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AN EXEMPLARY PROTESTANT: A STUDY OF THE MYTH OF JOHN HEWITT AND ITS
PLACE WITHIN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY DEBATE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an epistemological study of John Hewitt's place in critical dialogue on Northern Irish writing and offers a telling perspective on changing attitudes to Protestant cultures after the Troubles re-emerged in 1968. Hewitt's work is of crucial importance because of his insistently biographical style, and the length of his career which began soon after Northern Ireland was founded. The approach consists of close textual analysis of Hewitt's body of work and of material available in public archives, unpublished private sources, and from interviews with his acquaintances and professional associates. Chapters One and Two are a comparative study of Hewitt's, partly self-constructed, presentation as a martyr and the tarnishing of Samuel Ferguson's relationship to Ireland. Analysis of criticism of Ferguson by Robert O'Driscoll, Greagoir Ó Dúill and David Cairns and Shaun Richards reveals that he was increasingly traduced as a reactionary Protestant and purloiner of Ireland's cultural assets for the Ascendancy. A parallel study of Hewitt shows that he metamorphosed from neglected 'exile' to 'father of modern Ulster poetry', exemplary Protestant and icon of cultural liberalism. Chapters Three to Seven examine the use of Hewitt by Northern intellectuals, primarily Edna Longley, Michael Longley, Gerald Dawe, Tom Clyde and Frank Ormsby. The thesis develops the theme that Hewitt was imaginatively exploited to create a space apart from the unattractive choices to engage either with a 'compromised' ruling class within Northern Ireland or an ascendant romantic nationalism. In this respect, what is considered as Hewitt's 'radical regionalism' was particularly welcomed as a means to sustain a critical autonomy in the North. Chapter Three builds on Chapters One and Two by exploring the interrelationship between the development of political conflict, Hewitt's critical revival, and an escalating tendency to stereotype Protestant cultures. Chapters Four to Seven focus on Hewitt as myth maker, untangling the processes whereby he successfully projected himself as a socialist evangelist, radical regionalist, 'spiritual maverick', and idealised secular dissenter of English 'planter' stock. This extensive body of evidence demonstrates the use of Hewitt as a source for philanthropic models of community harmony, and provides the context within which this use of him takes place: a context which is distinguished by proliferating, negative views of 'Protestant' cultures and their literary legacies.

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INTRODUCTION

Northern Irish Protestant voices have suffered negative criticism since the Troubles re-emerged in 1968. Critics often seem to find it difficult to reconcile Protestant narratives to received ideas of 'nation' and 'national identity', particularly when interpreted through a romantic vision of Ireland as a fractured but historical and organic whole. Protestant writers are routinely judged inhibited through lack of a 'national tradition', locked in reaction to an obscurantist culture and troubled by identity crises. Chapters One and Two comprise parallel studies of two key 'Protestant' writers, Samuel Ferguson and John Hewitt. These consider evidence which shows that partisan influences forced dramatic shifts in their literary reputations.

In Chapter One, Hewitt's rise to prominence is juxtaposed with a context receptive to the 'myth' he assiduously propagated: that in the 1950s he was victimised by a repressive 'establishment' because of his anti-sectarian, radical socialist evangelism. It is suggested that this 'myth' had little substance but that by 1969 Hewitt's image as 'artist beset by bigots' had gained an observable mythological impetus that superseded previous critical indifference to his work. Hewitt claimed that in 1952 he was excluded from the Directorship of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery because of a Unionist intrigue. To investigate this accusation, Chapter One utilises previously unused archive material, particularly the Libraries, Museums & Art Committee Minutes of the Belfast City Council. Also consulted are contemporary newspaper reports and crucial primary

evidence held in the Public Record Office Northern Ireland [PRONI], including Roberta Hewitt's Journal.

Chapter Two examines a different author, Samuel Ferguson, and a downturn in his reputation that parallels the rise of Hewitt's. The reasons why unsympathetic approaches to Ferguson intensified are complex. When critics interpret Ferguson in the context of the Troubles, his overt Protestantism, stout defence of the nineteenth century British political system and determinedly equable approaches to Irish language literature and Ulster Scots lore seem to be viewed, at best, with embarrassment. Consequently, although Ferguson's contribution to Irish literature was pivotal he became increasingly sidelined. In 1965, Robert O'Driscoll identified Ferguson as an important pioneer and "originator of the Irish literary revival".¹ By 1976, however, O'Driscoll depicted Ferguson as a cultural nationalist whose romantic identification with Ireland led him to disregard his Protestant integrity and embrace an Irish identity.² O'Driscoll's revised emphasis seems to imply that the abandonment of a distinctive Irish Protestant integrity is a prerequisite for 'Irishness'. Chapter Two re-evaluates Ferguson's original correspondence which is held at the National Library of Scotland, his published writings and M. C. Ferguson's biography, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day* (1896). These suggest O'Driscoll used quotations misleadingly. Subsequent critics then recycled O'Driscoll's work to validate a politically crucial

¹ R. O'Driscoll, "Two voices : one beginning", *Dublin University Review*, 3, 8, (1965), 93.

² R. O'Driscoll, *An Ascendancy of the Heart : Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Irish Literature in English*, (1976).

misrepresentation of Ferguson. By the 1980s, Ferguson was interpreted largely within a twentieth century Marxist framework and reduced to exploiter of Ireland's cultural assets on behalf of the Ascendancy. The arguments outlined in this chapter posit an alternative view of Ferguson as a patriotic Irishman and convinced Protestant whose intellect subverts crude stereotyping. They contend that Ferguson's passionate dedication to his country's literary heritage is ill served when interpreted retrospectively through the narrow prism of contemporary political and sectarian ideologies.

In Chapters One and Two, comparison between Ferguson's downgraded status and Hewitt's rise from obscurity provides a useful critical perspective on attitudes to Protestant cultures. By 1970, Ferguson was considered a 'bad' Protestant. Conversely, Hewitt was simultaneously approved as a 'good' Protestant and icon of cultural liberalism. Chapter Three looks at the interrelationship between the development of political conflict - the Troubles - Hewitt's critical revival and an escalating tendency to stereotype Protestant cultures. Hewitt's career spanned sixty years, almost the entire history of the political state; together with his insistently biographical style, this gives his work crucial significance. After 1968, Derek Mahon's flight from the "God-fearing, God-chosen purist little puritans" ('Ecclesiastes' (1968))³ symbolised a common view of the Protestant imagination as inherently prosaic. Chapter Three explores an apparent academic malaise

³ D. Mahon, *Poems 1962-1978*, (1986), 31.

which maintained a conservative belief in the artist as legislator of society and institutionalised rather than challenged negative, blanket perceptions of Protestant cultures. This notion is examined by looking at the central role of the Arts Council in transforming Hewitt's conservative image in the 1940s and 1950s to that of visionary and radical activist in the early 1970s. Extensive use is made of crucial archive material which only recently became available for research at PRONI, the Minutes of the Literature Committee of the Arts Council for 1965 to 1979, and the primary evidence of Hewitt's private correspondence and Roberta Hewitt's Journal. The arguments in this chapter develop the theme that Hewitt became a figurehead for Northern intellectuals who, working through the auspices of the Arts Council and the academy, imaginatively exploited his myths to sustain critical autonomy by creating a space apart from the unattractive choices to engage either with a 'compromised' ruling class within Northern Ireland or an ascendant romantic nationalism.

Chapters Four, Five and Six identify the factors that brought Hewitt to prominence. Chapter Four explores Hewitt's regionalism of the 1940s as a prophetic model of community harmony. This is set in context and Lewis Mumford's influence on Hewitt is analysed together with articles in contemporary newspapers and journals and essays by Robert Greacen, W. R. Rodgers, Howard Sergeant and Hugh Shearman. The chapter utilises recently discovered archive material, particularly the Minute Book (1943-1947) of the Young Ulster Society founded by Thomas Carnduff in 1936 which is in private hands. Also central to this discussion are John

Montague's essay "Regionalism into reconciliation" (1964), and the crucial primary evidence of Hewitt's unpublished reciprocal letter of Spring 1964.⁴ The chapter investigates regionalism in Northern Ireland in the 1940s as a popular vogue among a peripheral elite, and suggests that Hewitt's 'vision' was conservative, inconsistent and unremarkable. It looks at the possibility that later estimates of Hewitt's regionalism, such as those by Edna Longley and Tom Clyde, as a substantive blueprint for cultural reconciliation are symptomatic of the politicisation of literary-critical dialogue.

Chapter Five examines Hewitt's profile as a superlative intellectual dissenter. Critically, Hewitt shrewdly detached himself from the Protestant 'mentality' by eschewing Reformation religious sects and imagining a specifically English, proto-socialist identity. In this chapter, Hewitt's 'identity' is explored as a mythological construct that formed the basis of his appeal to Northern revisionists because it enabled him to claim to be a radical dissenter from Northern Ireland's 'establishment' yet simultaneously assert a principled disavowal of the narrative of the nation. Hewitt's relevant comments in autobiographical writings, interviews and poems on 'faith' and family are analysed within a chronological framework and juxtaposed with the perspectives of his peers. This highlights vital inconsistencies in Hewitt's claim to a purist, secular dissenting inheritance and provides evidence which suggests that his 'nonconformist conscience' may have been variously adapted to politico-critical contexts. It is argued,

⁴J. Montague, *Poetry Ireland*, 3, (Spring 1964), and John Hewitt to J. Montague, TLS, (Spring 1964). John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster at Coleraine.

therefore, that assertions by Edna Longley, Tom Clyde and Ian Duhig that Hewitt's intellectual 'inheritance' could provide a philanthropic model for Northern Ireland's "savage quarters" are unsound.⁵

Chapter Six deconstructs Hewitt's myth by analysing his enduring fascination with Alexander Irvine which is recorded in four studies: "Portrait of Alexander Irvine" (1939), "The Laying on of Hands" (1948), "Alexander Irvine and his Legend" (1957) and "Alec of the Chimney Corner" (1968). When each piece is set in context beside Hewitt's autobiographical writings, private correspondence, Roberta Hewitt's Journal and previously unused journal articles and unpublished material, it is possible to discern an exploitative pattern. Chapter Six develops the theme that Hewitt's essays on Irvine are artfully tailored to the demands of his career at significant moments and that his contradictory estimates of Irvine's integrity amount to a cynical manipulation of his 'hero's' legendary status in Northern Ireland. It is suggested that this aspect of Hewitt was a crucial factor in his rise to prominence which followed shortly after he published "Alec of the Chimney Corner" in 1968.

Chapter Seven considers Hewitt's metamorphosis to 'Perfect Protestant' set against a context in which Protestant cultures were being comprehensively traduced. After the Troubles re-ignited in 1968, the insidious notion that Protestant art embodied a lesser Irish culture while Protestant artists uniformly inhabited a cultural void gathered momentum.

⁵ In *The Living Stream*, (1994), 127, Edna Longley writes that in Belfast "from the mid 1940s a small number of cultural missionaries were at work in various savage quarters".

Some, like Seamus Deane, single-mindedly pursued a romantic 'repossession' of the Irish imagination from its 'colonial' imprint. Conversely, Edna Longley engaged in a critical strategy that fought to sustain the concept of an educative Anglo-Irish literary culture as a vital continuum. Chapter Seven investigates the relation between this context and Hewitt's considerable success in projecting himself as a secular, radical dissenter of superlative English planter stock.

When introducing *Across a Roaring Hill : the Protestant imagination in modern Ireland* in 1985, Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley remarked that, "an ineradicable consciousness of *difference*, of being defined in, and against another culture, makes Irish protestantism and its literary consequences a special case". [Dawe's and Longley's emphasis] Set against this critical emphasis, Hewitt's shifting myth is unravelled; its complex strands are traced back through his poetry, published essays, autobiographical writings, interviews, unpublished private correspondence and public records. Chapter Seven analyses significant inconsistencies and highlights an apparent critical complacency towards Hewitt's claim to be descended from seventeenth century English Planters. It questions whether revisionist critics, squeezed between the uncompromising 'Britishness' of Northern Ireland's majority and an ascendant romantic nationalism, too eagerly grasped Hewitt's pliant mythology as a literary conceit through which 'planters' might be encouraged to reconcile themselves to their 'condition' and the 'natives' to the 'planters' claim that, "this is our country also" ('The colony' (1949-50)).

Placing John Hewitt at its centre, the arguments outlined in this thesis consider whether overlapping cultural and political imperatives forged largely negative critical approaches to Northern Irish 'Protestant' literature after 1968. This is done by investigating the link between Hewitt's myriad inconsistencies and their seemingly uncritical acceptance, and what emerges as a lamentable failure to engage with the complex reality of Protestant cultures.

CHAPTER 1

JOHN HEWITT'S DISCIPLES AND THE 'KALEYARD
PROVINCIALS'

Despite its considerable volume John Hewitt's work does not enjoy a wide audience. By contrast, the launch of the Hewitt Summer School in 1987 reflected his laureate status among "sections of Ulster's liberal Protestant intelligentsia".¹ A recurrent theme in criticism of Hewitt is that he was victimised for his political views and driven into exile. This has transformed him from time-served Council official to principled martyr of an abortive intellectual revolution against a "culturally amputated" junta.² In 1957, Martin Wallace commented that Hewitt's liberal views provoked "ill-considered opposition to his application for the post of [Belfast Museum and Art Gallery] Director in 1953 ... it also sent him to Coventry".³ Nearly thirty years later, Edna Longley suggested that Hewitt's "open and open ended" regionalism failed because in 1953 he was "made a political scapegoat for his socialist and literary allegiances".⁴ Martin Mooney gave a

¹ M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, "A limited regionalism", M. Crozier, ed., *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland, Varieties of Britishness*, (1990), 170.

² E. Longley, "Writing, revisionism & grass-seed : literary mythologies in Ireland", G. Dawe and E. Longley, eds., *Across a Roaring Hill : the Protestant imagination in modern Ireland*, (1985), 19.

³ M. Wallace, "A poet and his past", *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.57. Hewitt became Art Director, Herbert Gallery, Coventry, in 1957.

⁴ E. Longley, "Progressive Bookmen", *Irish Review*, 1, (1986), 56.

broader picture when he observed that Hewitt “twinned his Regionalism and his socialism to give an account of the role of the writer in society, in opposition to the complacencies of the Unionist establishment and the kaleyard provincials”.⁵ By 1992, Ian Duhig had claimed that Hewitt’s Protestantism “nurtured the libertarian socialism he developed ... at the anarchist end of the spectrum, against what he called the anthill or the beehive states’, and that his ‘progressive non-sectarianism cost him a career on his home ground’”.⁶ The Biographical Chronology to *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991) presents Hewitt’s ‘victimisation’ as historical fact; it records that in 1953 Hewitt “applies for the Directorship ... but is denied the post, largely because of his radical and socialist ideals”. To understand how Hewitt’s ‘victimhood’ became a focus for the misrepresentation of his politico-cultural significance, it is necessary to re-examine the available evidence relating to the Belfast City Council’s decision not to appoint him Director of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, which was in fact taken in September 1952.

Hewitt graduated with a B.A. General Degree from Queen’s University in 1930. Surprisingly, in view of his preferred image as an “old-fashioned Man of Letters”, Hewitt took six years to complete having twice been

⁵M. Mooney, “A native mode : language and regionalism in the poetry of John Hewitt”, *Irish Review*, 3, (1988), 69.

⁶I. Duhig, “Pictures carried with singing”, *Irish Review*, 12, (Spring-Summer 1992), 166, 168.

unable to 'proceed'.⁷ While on leave from university, Hewitt contributed to left-wing journals, attended Trade Union and Labour Party Conferences and was a regular patron of McLean's Progressive Bookshop. Significantly, none of these activities appear to have compromised Hewitt's employment prospects; he recalled that, as he "idly read the morning papers" in the Autumn of 1930 he saw an advertisement for an art assistant's post at the Museum: "it struck me that this would be a pleasant job ... So I applied ... The advert said 'No canvassing' which, of course, made it obligatory ... So ... I went along to a local councillor ... Eventually I got the job".⁸ Hewitt was short-listed with an Englishman, Wilfred Arthur Seaby; the candidates were approximately matched except that Seaby had taken intermediate art

⁷ J. Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then ... younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 13-16. Biographical Chronology to *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991) states that Hewitt entered Queen's to read English and got a B.A. Official records show a different story. Graduation Programme, 10.07.1930, QUB., registers a 'B.A. General Degree (Pass)'. Moreover, between 1924 and 1930, Hewitt twice did not 'proceed'; he failed French in the first year, English language and History in the second year and History again in the fourth year. He was unregistered in the third and fifth years when he retook History to be readmitted. After his first year out, Hewitt was registered at Queen's University and Stranmillis Teacher Training College in the academic year 1927-28, passed preliminary teacher training but failed History I at Queen's for the second time. He was not registered at Queen's the following year, but passed the second year of teacher training at Stranmillis and retook History I for the third time as an external candidate. This chronology suggests Hewitt was 'sent down' from Queen's in 1926 and had to rethink the direction his education would take. See Matriculation Register of Trained Teachers, Stranmillis Teacher Training College, (1927-1929).

⁸ N. Johnston, "John Hewitt", *Belfast Telegraph*, 13.04.1983, 10. Hewitt retells this experience in 1985 but doesn't refer to having canvassed a local councillor. See Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then ... younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 15.

at London University and “showed ... critical discrimination”.⁹ However, it was Hewitt, who had no formal training in the arts, who secured his place in the ‘beehive state’.¹⁰

Hewitt proved to be a volatile employee. Kenneth Jamison recalled that “some people found him difficult, seemingly rude even ... [and] ... disconcertingly monosyllabic”.¹¹ Hewitt admitted he was a self-absorbed, “bumptious and difficult person”, that he had attracted Thomas Carnduff’s disapproval for his “brash ideas ... a little dogmatically expressed”.¹² In *Odd Man Out* (1945), F. L. Green caricatured Hewitt as ‘Griffin’, an officious opportunist whose self-aggrandising interest in ‘art’ inclined him to applaud

⁹ Belfast City Council, Libraries, Museums & Art Committee Minutes, 17.10.1930. [Minutes].

¹⁰ Hewitt’s ‘I learn about art’ (1979) observes: “Low on my father’s shelves there lay this book, / ... / and through those pages often I would look / ... So I learned from these skeletal Landseers, / da Vincis, Turners, Michelangelos - / this trick surviving my unlettered years / would give my gallery days a running start-”. John Kilfeather claims Hewitt “confessed his sole art training had consisted of memorising a column in *Boys Own Paper* from which he learnt all he knew about perspective, composition and colour harmony ... [and] ... made no attempt to understand anybody after Picasso”. See “Remembering John Hewitt”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 31. When Hewitt got his job, Northern Ireland unemployment rose from thirteen per cent in 1927 to thirty per cent in 1938. The figures are even more startling when presented in human terms; in 1938 there were 100,000 unemployed out of an insured population of 300,000. For further analysis see “Ulster’s Economic Position”, *Viewpoint*, Northern Ireland Labour Party, 10.05.1950, 3-5. S. McMahon noted that Belfast in this era was ‘rife with sectarianism as always but there was also poverty and such poverty that any man of sensitivity sought the only possible means of amelioration - left-wing politics’. See “Obituary, Sam Hanna Bell”, *Linen Hall Review*, 7, 1/2, (1990), 7.

¹¹ K. Jamison, ‘A personal reminiscence by Kenneth Jamison, Director of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’, S. Flanagan, ed., *A Poet’s Pictures*, Antrim, 1987, 8.

¹² J. Hewitt, *I Found Myself Alone*, Landseer Films, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, (1978), and “The Carnduff Lecture”, AMs, Unpublished paper presented to the Arts Council, (May 1974), John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster at Coleraine.[JHC]

or dismiss in “robust, crisp fashion” and “sometimes exalt[s] fools or make[s] little mistakes regarding men of talent”.¹³ Notably, Green based his parody on personal knowledge of Hewitt, whose popular association with ‘Griffin’ in local newspaper articles suggests that his alter ego’s inclination for bombast mimicked a personality consummately predisposed to confrontation.¹⁴

More formal evidence of Hewitt’s Griffinesque qualities is logged in the Libraries, Museums & Art Committee Minutes of the Belfast City Council [Minutes]. In 1935, for example, they record the Committee’s unease at Hewitt’s “adversely criti[cal]” review of Sir John Lavery, who is listed in the Museum’s History as an important benefactor and “distinguished Belfast-born artist”. In “The Ulster Academy of Arts Exhibition (Oct.24-Dec.1)”, Hewitt remarked:

There is an eternal fitness of things, and the people [Lavery] paints get exactly the painting they deserve. The Lonsdale portrait looks as if it had been painted by a coachman. The shoddy, reach-me-down handling, the badly realised crosslegs, the bungled distribution of light, the clipped-off cigar.¹⁵

Of the exhibition generally, Hewitt observed that, “not more than fifteen ... of the two hundred and forty works ... [on display] ... should have been

¹³ F. L. Green, *Odd Man Out*, (1947 (1945)), 163.

¹⁴ For example, M. Wallace, “A poet and his past”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.57.

¹⁵ J. Hewitt, *The New Northman*, (Autumn 1934), 8-9.

allowed to leave the studio". Unsurprisingly, the Museum, which was rate-supported with an official policy to promote local artists, formally "disassociate[d] itself" from this unprofessional review; at a formal disciplinary hearing, Hewitt was required to "give an undertaking that he would not cause such further embarrassment to the corporation".¹⁶ Undaunted, in 1951 Hewitt returned to Lavery in "Painting and sculpture in Ulster", one of a collection of essays published to promote 'Ulster' art during the Festival of Britain. Now Keeper of Art, Hewitt conceded that, "in his approach to portraiture Lavery knew what he was doing", but described him as, "native Irish stock", observed his "certain peasant honesty of observation", judged his penchant for making earls "almost regal ... no more than the Irishman's innate desire to please", and determined his "vigorous gusto for ceremonial colour surely another racial characteristic".¹⁷ Hewitt's comments are marginally less strident than those in the earlier review; nonetheless, they reveal a patronising, essentially hostile approach to Lavery, and comprise a blatantly inappropriate assessment of the person and achievement of an artist whose work formed the Museum's main contribution to the Festival. By contrast, in the same

¹⁶ Minutes, 15.02.1935 and 01.03.1935 and J. C. Nolan, "John Hewitt, museum creator", AMs, Presidential Address to the Belfast Literary Society, 14 November (1994). Nolan : Private Papers.

¹⁷ J. Hewitt, "Painting and sculpture in Ulster", *The Arts in Ulster* (1951), 82. Hewitt's designating Lavery as 'other' contrasts with Robert Greacen's remark that, "Sir John Lavery won some cultural distinction for our homeland". See Editorial, *Northern Harvest : Anthology of Ulster Writing*, (1944).

essay Hewitt observed of contemporary “Protestant working-class” street art that it displayed a “bold sense of pattern carried out with a naïve sincerity ... roundels and insets [that] frequently achieve a surprising quality ... waver[ing] between medieval and Douanier-like conceptions”.⁽⁹³⁾ Hewitt’s assessment of ‘Protestant’ street murals is particularly revealing when juxtaposed with Richard Kirkland’s observation that the over-riding pattern of his “intellectual life ... [was] one in which methodology seeks to restrict the chaos of sensory impression”.¹⁸ Tellingly, however, Roberta Hewitt’s Journal, which is held in the Public Record Office Northern Ireland [PRONI], notes that when Hewitt wrote “Painting and sculpture in Ulster” (1951) he confidently expected to become Director of the Museum.¹⁹ Accordingly, it is significant that, shortly after he accepted the post of Art Director at the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry, Hewitt re-evaluated Lavery’s ‘native’ qualities. In “Sir John Lavery : Centenary” (1957), he described the artist as “formal ... very courteous ... of a gentle dignity ... a very good man who had no need or wish for the emphatic gesture”.²⁰ Interpreted in context, therefore, it might be deduced that Hewitt’s contrasting perspectives on Lavery and ‘Protestant’ street art

¹⁸ R. Kirkland, “The daddy of us all?”, *Causeway*, 13 (Summer 1994), 22.

¹⁹ R. Hewitt remarks, “Jonny is always so very optimistic ... he preaches ‘not IF I am Director of the Museum WHEN’”. Journal, 09.11.1947. Public Record Office Northern Ireland. [PRONI].

²⁰ J. Hewitt, *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.02.1956.

during the Festival in *The Arts in Ulster* were calculated to help rather than hinder his promotion prospects with the Belfast City Council.

However, when the Council appointed a new Director of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery in September 1952, it was not Hewitt but the outside candidate and Englishman, Wilfred Arthur Seaby.²¹ Mary O'Malley challenged the decision in Council. Ironically, in view of Hewitt's canvassing for privilege in 1930, O'Malley objected on the grounds that any "appointments system which depended on pressure ... by council members ... was naturally undemocratic and unjust". Specifically, O'Malley claimed that a letter "from a member of the Eire Labour Party" influenced the Committee against Hewitt. Chairman Tougher's casting vote decided Seaby's appointment and his reply is interesting.

Nothing written in a letter to me made any difference ... I knew a year and a half ago I would not be able to agree to Mr. Hewitt's appointment ... I found it very hard to vote against a Belfastman, but ... I had to decide either to be popular ... or appoint the best man for the job.²²

While Tougher's remarks admit prejudice incompatible with the integrity of the Chair, their political naïveté undermines the view that a co-ordinated 'plot' existed to exclude Hewitt. First, given Hewitt's vigorous lobbying for

²¹ Minutes, 26.09.1952.

²² M. O'Malley and P. Tougher quoted in "Privilege query over Museum post", *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 02.10.1952.

support, Tougher cannot have predicted his vote would be required.²³ Second, Tougher locates the emergence of his antipathy in Summer 1951, which is coincident with Hewitt's Griffinesque review of Lavery. Third, Tougher's claim that he was motivated to "appoint the best man for the job" is compatible with Hewitt's comment in "From chairman and committee men" that his being considered to have poor administrative skills was a significant factor in the decision not to promote him. Notably, in the Museum's History, there is only a brief reference to Hewitt's Keepership compared to the fulsome account of his successor's energetic innovation. Moreover, O'Malley's recollection that Hewitt did not interview very well is consistent with his having failed on three previous occasions to proceed beyond interview for senior posts in Liverpool, Norwich and the West Indies.²⁴ Fourth, it is possible to detect a note of sincerity in Tougher's expressed reluctance to be "unpopular" and appoint an outsider. In context, local employment had fallen disastrously and the Unionist administration was being harried by a resurgent Labour Party; an *Irish News* headline, "Museum job given to Englishman instead of Belfast applicant" reflected

²³ In "From chairmen and committee men", Hewitt recalled that he canvassed W. R. Gordon "a personal friend on the committee", Roberta Hewitt "communicated with ... a non-council member", while Z. Frankl approached a "relative of a council member" on Hewitt's behalf.

²⁴ O'Malley writes, "It struck me in the course of the meeting that there was considerable prejudice against Hewitt" ... [but] ... I had to admit that Hewitt had not made such a good showing at the interview, and did not have army service. This factor could be a deciding one." O'Malley, *Never Shake Hands with the Devil*, (1990), 64-65. O'Malley was new to this committee having been appointed only the previous July. John Hewitt discusses his attempts at promotion in, "Griffin", (1961), JHC.

this pressure and typified unwelcome press scrutiny.²⁵ Finally, Hewitt often claimed he was Deputy by September 1952; indeed, Biographical Chronology to *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991) also registers Hewitt's progress from "chief assistant" in 1943 to "deputy Director and keeper of art" in 1950. Both versions imply Hewitt's career prospects were inexplicably halted in 1953. Problematically, neither is consistent with Minutes which record that Hewitt became Keeper in 1945, and that by 1950 a total of three Keepers were subordinate to a Deputy and Director.²⁶ After the Deputy became ill, in January 1952 the Director proposed Hewitt as his temporary replacement. This is important because it seems unlikely the Director would have done this without consulting Hewitt on his willingness to serve; yet in "From chairmen and committee men", Hewitt inferred that the Director had colluded in a plot to block his promotion.²⁷ Significantly, the Committee refused to appoint Hewitt acting Deputy, but did make him

²⁵ Anon. *Irish News*, 2.10.1952. See also "Belfast Museum Director : casting vote for Englishman", *Belfast News-Letter*, 27.09.1952. "Englishman proposed as Museum Chief : Casting vote in 'tie' ousts Belfast candidate", *The Northern Whig*, 27.09.1952. In context, employment had shrunk by 6%. See A. Boyd, *The Two Irelands*, Fabian Research Series 269, (May, 1968).

²⁶ N. Nesbitt, *A Museum in Belfast*, (1979), 42. Minute, 20.08.1943 refers to Hewitt as "chief assistant", but since there is no record of staff promotion or reorganisation before 1945, the grade "chief assistant" probably reflects a service increment. Minute, 29.06.1951, refers to Hewitt as Keeper of Art in June, 1951.

²⁷ R. Hewitt's Journal records that, "Mr Frankl ... advised Johnny [to] use all his charm and cunning to work himself in as Director when Mr. Stendhall goes". Together with Stendhall's putting him forward for temporary promotion, this suggests that the atmosphere at the Museum was not as rabidly 'anti Hewitt' as he later implied.

temporary Senior Keeper.²⁸ This is evidence that, eight months before the Director's retirement, Hewitt knew he had been sponsored to become Deputy, but that the Committee had avoided raising his hopes of the Directorship by denying him the temporary promotion. Surprisingly, Hewitt's memoir of events omits this detail; as suicidal protagonist in "From chairmen and committee men", he recalls only "instinctive" unease and "some curiosity" that the "silver-haired, naked-faced Director" and his "silver-haired and naked-faced cronies" spent an evening plotting with Chairman Tougher before the interview.

While it is impossible to reconstruct the internal politics of the Museum in 1952, when this evidence is considered beside the calibre of his Lavery reviews, it suggests that long-term friction between Hewitt and Museum policy was not rooted solely in crude Unionist vendettas.²⁹ Crucially, writing in her Journal in October 1952, Roberta Hewitt criticised her husband's insistence on being a "forthright person, giving his opinion and not paying much attention to the people on the Town Council in fact despising them and making no effort to be nice to them - and yet he expected them to give him this job". J. C. Nolan, former Director of the

²⁸ Minutes, 25.01.1952.

²⁹ In "The laying on of hands" (1948), John Hewitt tells how Alexander Irvine was ostracised by City Officials for making a radical speech in a Labour Hall. Hewitt describes Belfast's prominent citizens as "leading bandwaggoners". Given contemporary political tensions and the story's appearance in a Dublin journal, this comment by a council employee might be considered provocative. See *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 27-36.

Ulster Museum, also noted that the Lavery incident did not “prevent [Hewitt] from making frequent adverse comments on his employers”.³⁰ Accordingly, it is possible to speculate that Hewitt was generally perceived as operating with a professional hubris incompatible with his role as public servant, and that he was considered temperamentally unsuited to manage the diverse priorities of a public resource with equity.

By contrast, introducing *Ancestral Voices* in 1987, Tom Clyde claimed that Hewitt was “denied the post of director through backroom manoeuvring and for no reason other than that he was regarded as politically unsuitable”. Clyde maintained that after this Hewitt was traumatised and suffered “acute depression”, which ended an “extraordinarily fertile ten years” culminating in “Planter’s gothic” (1953). Clyde continued, “that very success ... made the blow which he received in 1953 seem even more cruel ... until he left Belfast there was not one major article or large-scale project”.³¹ This chronology is wholly misleading. Hewitt bid for the Directorship in September 1952, and his failure to secure it did not result in literary paralysis. In 1953, Hewitt’s autobiographical extracts from “Planter’s gothic” appeared serially in *The Bell’s* Spring,

³⁰ J. C. Nolan, “John Hewitt, museum creator”, AMs, Presidential Address to the Belfast Literary Society, 14 November (1994). Nolan : Private Papers.

³¹ In *Tuppenny Stung*, (1994), 64, Michael Longley uses almost identical wording to draw parallels with his treatment by the Arts Council which, he claims, suddenly and inexplicably offered him an enhanced package to retire early, an indication perhaps of his close affinity with Hewitt.

Summer and Autumn issues, he became art critic for the *Belfast Telegraph* and *Irish Times*, and wrote two seminal essays, “The course of writing in Ulster” (1953) and “We are marking our place in literature” (1953). With McFadden, Hewitt produced an “Impression” of the International PEN Conference for *The Bell*. In 1954 *The Bloody Brae* was broadcast, and in 1956 Hewitt published *Those Swans Remember*. Hewitt’s emotional recovery may have been accelerated when, having finally been promoted to Deputy in October 1952, he received a salary increase which was backdated to February.³² Indeed, recalling the period for John Montague, Hewitt declared “my tone grew firmer ... more courageous ... This was the beginning of my freedom ... I was more active than ever in art criticism ... It was perhaps the period of my greatest influence in Belfast, for I now had the advantage of wearing a martyr’s tie”.³³ Writing privately to Roy McFadden, Hewitt confided that he felt free to be candid with Montague because, “the generation-gap keeps us from jostling”.³⁴ Together with his admitting to having exploited his ‘victimisation’, these comments expose Hewitt’s competitive spirit. Elaborating this crucial aspect of his character,

³² “Appointment of Deputy Director”, Minutes, 31.10.1952. The ratifying Committee for this appointment was almost identical to the earlier one, and Tougher was again in the chair. In her Journal, R. Hewitt writes that there were no interviews for the post, “Stendhall told John that [the job] is yours if you want it”. Hewitt did not have to wait for the incoming Director to arrive before taking the post (the correct procedure) because, Journal records, influence was exercised on his behalf by Councillor A. Millar. The Hewitts regarded this as a small “victory” if a poor substitute for the top job.

³³ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), JHC.

³⁴ J. Hewitt to R. McFadden, ALS, 12.04.1971.

there is further evidence that Hewitt held an egocentric view of his artistic and intellectual status. Writing to Montague, he claimed that in the 1940s he had been, “the only person to call myself a regionalist and had no disciples ... My critics inadvertently spread my gospel by their unstinted attacks”.³⁵

Edna Longley is one of Hewitt’s most influential disciples. Discussing his “new way of thinking about the North” in the 1940s, in “Progressive Bookmen” she links the eclipse of Hewitt’s regionalist ‘phase’ to his frustrated job prospects:

But in 1953 Hewitt missed an important chance to implement his vision when Unionist intrigue denied him the directorship ... In the same year he published ‘The colony’, which translates his cultural meditations into his most sophisticated poetic model of Ulster politics.³⁶

Longley’s reading of ‘The colony’, and her implied connection between it and Hewitt’s ‘victimisation’, is interesting beside a more rigorous chronology. Although ‘The colony’ was first published in 1953, in “No rootless colonist” (1972) Hewitt located the genesis of the poem “precise[ly] ... after Christmas 1949”, and declared that it, “allegorised the regional circumstance as that of a Roman colony at the Empire’s waning, and in what terms the colonists viewed the situation ... this is the definitive statement of my realisation that I am an Ulsterman”. Hewitt did claim that ‘The colony’ had “some representative validity”, but equally admitted that

³⁵ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), JHC.

³⁶ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 126.

his work “no more than outline[d] the chart of a highly personal journey to a point of self-realisation. I have not offered a routing for another’s setting out ... Nor have I discussed the matter of the Two Nations”. Arguably, therefore, Longley’s hypothesis stands only if the problems of contemporary ‘Ulster politics’ are digested and allegorised within identity crises in descendants of Plantation immigrants. Typically, Hewitt presents a paradox, describing ‘The colony’ as a recreation of a ‘colony’s’ birth with “every statement backed by historical fact”, and a means to “admit our load of guilt ... / ... and ... make amends”. (‘The colony’) Perhaps ‘The colony’ enacts a tentative experiment in Jungian analytical psychology or, to use Hewitt’s phrase from “The bitter gourd” (1945), “the lonely ascents of practical mysticism”.³⁷ John Layard observes that, “analysis conducted on these lines ... recognize[s] symbols of ever less personal nature ... reaching down layer by layer through the stages of cultural evolution ... to primitive beliefs ... returning upward again to make a synthesis of varied experiences”.³⁸ Layard contends that once activated, the “redemptive

³⁷ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, 111. Roy McFadden recalls “the teaching of C. G. Jung dominated the Hewitt household during the Forties”, that during a social evening at Hewitt’s home “Jungian allusions pervaded the room”, and that Hewitt congratulated him on the publication of *Flowers for a Lady* in 1945, saying he and Ruby “have agreed that in Jung’s phraseology you are a fine ‘feeling’ poet”. See “No dusty pioneer”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 9. Jung’s *The Integration of Personality* is numbered with Hewitt’s “List of books read in 1947”, JHC. See also T. Brown, “John Hewitt : an Ulster of the mind”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, eds., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 299-31.

³⁸ J. Layard, Introduction, *The Lady of the Hare : being a study in the healing power of dreams*, (1941). R. McFadden recalls that this book fascinated the Hewitts, McFadden interviewed by S. Ferris, Belfast, July 1996.

process ... resolve[s] personal complexes". (21) Interpreted within this paradigm, 'The colony' invokes a "less personal" symbolic reality and invites cultural synthesis. This reading of 'The colony' is consistent with Longley's emphasis on Hewitt's 'region' as a sort of embryonic 'fifth province', and her interpretation of his poetry as being "largely inspired by cultural retrieval ... as opposed to the dubious *imperium*".³⁹ [Longley's emphasis]

Notably, however, in 1951, when Hewitt was still in confident hope of "the succession" to the Directorship, he identified the "racial" characteristics of Northern Ireland's "natives" and the picaresque ingenuousness of loyalist "Folk Art" in "Painting and sculpture in Ulster". In "The course of writing in Ulster", which, like 'The colony', was published in 1953 - the year after his career upset - Hewitt dismissed Gaelic influences in 'Ulster' as being "outside the experience of the colonists", having "no obvious effect upon our tradition, except ... in the ears of those who have an affection for the odd dialect word". This evidence subverts Longley's claim that Hewitt experienced a metamorphosis in his thinking which developed into a superlative cultural vision, so that he imagined an Ulster that "exemplifies, and might capitalise on, the cultural interpenetration of 'these islands' [and] the subtler ideology unionist paranoia precluded".⁴⁰ Terence Brown's cautionary note that Hewitt's

³⁹ E. Longley, "Including the North", *Texts and Contexts*, 3, (1988), 21.

⁴⁰ E. Longley, "John Hewitt, 1907-1987", *Fortnight*, 254, (September 1987), 22.

engagement with “the story of our country’s past and the rights and wrongs of it’ ... was to be from a particular vantage point” is more appropriate.⁴¹ Specifically, if this simplistic and reductive thinking reflects Hewitt’s mind set in the 1940s and early 1950s, it seems unlikely that he would have been ‘victimised’ for his progressive, non-sectarian “nitty gritty” socialist perspectives.⁴²

However, as Hewitt’s ‘Mosaic’ (1972) concedes, “history is selective” and Plantation narratives are famously disputed. In 1991 the twin publications, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* and *The Field Day Anthology*, symbolised a decade of institutionalised dialogues between the New Irelanders of Field Day locked in serried reaction to the colonial experience, and academics from, in Longley’s phrase, the island’s “liberal enclaves”.⁴³ Longley’s proscription of Protestant cultures and benign interpretation of Hewitt’s claim to “rights drawn from the soil and sky” are germane to her efforts to seize critical initiative. In her lecture to the 1995 John Hewitt International Summer School, “Making Celtic waves : John Hewitt and Ossian”, Longley attempted to redraw critical battle lines between competing literary histories by exploiting Hewitt’s “clash with

⁴¹ T. Brown, “John Hewitt :an Ulster poet”, *Topic 24 : A Journal of the Liberal Arts*, Fall, (1972), 61. Brown quotes from J. Hewitt, ‘The family next door’, *Threshold*, 23 (Summer, 1970), 17-18.

⁴² E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 118. Longley writes that Hewitt “attended to the nitty-gritty of political action - watching out for anti-Catholic discrimination in the Gallery, befriending the manual workers there”.

⁴³ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 15.

unionism” and subsuming the ‘national’ question within his figurative regional boundaries. Depicting Hewitt as “artist beset by bigots”, Longley hurled a secular, ‘Protestant’ poetic model of ‘Ulster’ politics at the complacencies she perceived in the relationship between Irish socialism and nationalist politics; Hewitt as atheist, socialist and victim of cultural philistines was transformed into a symbolic link to an eighteenth century intellectual Protestant elite, one without archaic superstitions and stubborn allegiances.⁴⁴

Paradoxically, Longley’s Arnoldian interpretation of Hewitt as a ‘cultural missionary’ relentlessly pursues a sacrificial motif.⁴⁵ This feeds from a pervasive theme in her writing that the “political consciousness” of “writers from a Protestant background ... illuminates the darkest area”.⁴⁶ For Longley, the “darkest area” is Unionism which “avoided literature; she contends that “Unionists and Protestants have often culturally amputated themselves by claiming kin with extra-territorial, imperial, Anglo or Anglo-American culture”. Longley’s discourse reflects wider reluctance to engage with Northern Irish Protestant cultures and is striking beside Joe McMinn’s

⁴⁴ In “From Cathleen to Anorexia : the breakdown of Irelands”, (1990), 3, E. Longley contends Unionism is a “coalition of sects, interests, loyalties and incoherent hatreds”, that “Orangeism and Paisleyism maintain a select tribal memory bank of historical persecutions”.

⁴⁵ E. Longley, “Writing, revisionism & grass-seed : literary mythologies in Ireland”, G. Dawe and E. Longley, ed., *Across a Roaring Hill : the Protestant imagination in modern Ireland*, (1985), 19.

⁴⁶ E. Longley, “Progressive Bookmen”, (1986), 50.

analysis of her “sustained and obsessive objections to the ideology of Field Day” because it revealed “the incurably absolutist thought-processes [she attributes to] even sophisticated Nationalists”.⁴⁷ Moreover, Longley takes a contentious starting point; eliding cultural and political analysis, she imposes a powerful ‘given’ on the reality of Protestant cultures, a tendency which is also evident in Declan Kiberd’s questioning of the relevance of Hewitt’s ‘progressive spirit’ to Irish critical discourse. Kiberd contended this was peripheral because Hewitt “felt it enough to be the critic of his own people’s rigidity ... Not for him the dazzling dialectics of a Yeats”.⁴⁸ Kiberd extends this argument with an ambiguous caveat when he attributes Hewitt’s cautious craftsmanship to his having, “come from the north where he had many brushes with the intransigence of the unionist establishment”. Kiberd’s remarks mischievously reassert an earlier, singularly “unrevised verdict” on the “barbarous vulgarity and boot-faced sobriety” of the Protestant imagination.⁴⁹ With its assumption that the reader will identify an obdurate ‘unionist establishment’ with the Belfast City Council as microcosm of the political state and exemplar for the mores of all its

⁴⁷ J. McMinn, “In defence of Field Day : talking among the ruins”, *Fortnight*, 224, (September 1985), 19. McMinn is responding to E. Longley, “More martyrs to abstraction”, *Fortnight*, 206, (July-August 1984), 18.

⁴⁸ D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, (1995), 452.

⁴⁹ D. Kiberd, *Anglo-Irish Attitudes*, Field Day Pamphlet, 6, (1984), 22. Kiberd approves F. S. L. Lyons’s documentation of “That curious blend of resolution and hysteria, of barbarous vulgarity and boot-faced sobriety which lies beneath the emotions of Ulster Protestantism”.

Protestant peoples, Kiberd's reference to Hewitt's 'victimisation' is an intriguing exposé of its bipartisan appeal.

In *Tuppeny Stung* (1994), Michael Longley recalled that his first enterprise as "temporary Exhibitions Officer" at the Arts Council in 1970 was *The Planter and the Gael*, a reading tour featuring Hewitt and John Montague. (45, 49) The rubric on the accompanying booklet stated that, "Montague defines the culture of the Gael ... Hewitt that of the Planter". In "No rootless colonist" (1972), Hewitt admitted that, whereas previously 'The colony' was ignored, it was plucked from oblivion for the tour and printed in the booklet. This revealing transformation of Hewitt's public persona from 'exile' to cultural exemplar on a public stage reflects the commitment he shared with Michael Longley to "resolution through the arts council".⁵⁰ Compare Hewitt's exhortation to the 'alert' in the forties to breathe life into the 'dry bones' with Longley's vision of the arts in 1971 as a "path of stepping stones" in a "civilised" society.⁵¹

Problematically, it might be argued that, like Irish nationalist commitment to a teleological view of history, exhortation and vision are inherently undemocratic; an *Irish Times* editorial published in 1972 suggests that, just two years after he had appeared with John Montague in *The Planter and the Gael*, Hewitt had been taken up as representative of the

⁵⁰Felix, "The Planter and the Gael", *Fortnight*, 6, (December 1970), 10. In the 1970s, Longley was Literary Officer and Assistant Director of the Arts Council. Hewitt served as Chair of the Literature Committee for two years during this period.

⁵¹M. Longley, Introduction, *Causeway : The Arts in Ulster*, (1971), 9.

'Northern majority'.⁵² Addressing the aftermath of Direct Rule in Northern Ireland, the editor advised Northern Protestants to "make up their minds to put their roots down here permanently" and, quoting from 'The colony' hammered home his message: "in the words of their own poet, John Hewitt, the Northern majority will be able to say, 'we would be strangers in the Capitol; / this is our country also... .. ; / and we shall not be outcast on the world'". The editor's co-option of Hewitt is ironic because 'The colony' can be read as an apologia for colonialism rather than as a redemptive recasting of the 'Northern Protestant' mind set. The poem is an exposition on the 'immigrant' mind and purpose. Written between Christmas 1949 and January 1950, it addressed an overwhelmingly proud, patriotic context sure of Caesar's integrity and suspicious of that part of the island outside "the Roman peace".⁵³ Hewitt's Roman exemplar is a distancing device breaking ground for subsequent waves of "colonists, / provincials, landless citizens," to Ireland's shores. As in all Hewitt's poetry, rhyme and metre are complementary and stately, ironic intention is muted and controlled, and the Roman allegory is subsumed in the minutiae of colonial enterprise. There are rabble-rousers among the generals, tax absconders among the skilled law clerks, profiteers among the debtors and

⁵² Editorial, "Not outcast on the world" *Irish Times*, 25.03.1972.

⁵³ The war heightened Ulster Unionists' sense of community with Britain; the Republic was perceived to be isolated and demonstrably different.

mistresses bedded with men-at-arms. The barbarism of brutal conquest is refracted through an image of mercenaries “smoking out the nests / of the barbarian tribesmen, clan by clan”. With masterly understatement, ‘The colony’ captures the paralysis engendered by “the terror that dogs us”, the threat of dispossession and counter-dispossession, slaughter and counter-slaughter, when it flatly observes, “we had to build in stone for ever after’. Finally, ‘The colony’ reflects:

I think these natives human, think their code,
though strange to us, and farther from the truth,
only a little so - to be redeemed
if they themselves rise up against the spells
and fears their celibates surround them with.

‘The colony’s’ allusion to Protestant doctrinal emphases on redemption is denied the saving grace of a putative ironic intention by the lines, “we have rights drawn from the soil and sky; / the use, the pace, the patient years of labour”. Indeed, as it moves ambiguously between enquiry and assertion, ‘The colony’s’ missionary impulse hardens into impasse, fails to secure “cultural synthesis”; its “unobserved ... hunkered ... barbarians” remain culturally unretrieved, mutely sign the limits of Hewitt’s “open and open ended” regionalism and subliminally endorse the “dubious *imperium*”.

Reviewing *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991), James McKendrick wondered if ‘The colony’ offered “radical concessions for the Ascendancy of the fifties”, and if Hewitt’s ‘natives’ were in danger of being

“overwhelmed by his open-mindedness”.⁵⁴ Like Hewitt’s whimsical manipulation of regionalist ideas around ‘Ulster’s’ political idiosyncrasies, the casuistry that informs ‘The colony’ indicates that the balance of probability is against overtly original or radical ‘concessions’ outside theoretical exchanges in Belfast’s Progressive Bookshop and desultory conversations in Campbell’s Cafe. In ‘Sonnet for the progressive bookshop’ Hewitt recalled that there, “young men come to talk, argue and show / brave lyrics to their friends”,⁵⁵ and in “No rootless colonist” (1972) he remembered only a “vague sense of a romantic Irish nationalism ... our politics looked beyond to the world. Sacco and Vanzetti were, for us, far more significant than any of the celebrated ‘felons of our land’”.⁵⁶ Commenting on the local scene in “Belfast is an Irish city”, published in *The Bell* in April 1952, Thomas Carnduff complained that “there is a cultural problem in Ireland deriving from a sectarian problem, and Irish writers are not as conscious as they should be”. Is it, the erstwhile

⁵⁴ J. McKendrick, “Stoats and hedgehogs”, *Independent*, 23.04.1992.

⁵⁵ J. Hewitt, ‘Sonnet for the Progressive Bookshop, 17, Union Street, Belfast’, quoted in Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 117. Longley dates the poem in 1929.

⁵⁶ In “Ulster isn’t so scarce of promising new writers”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 14.08.1941, Robert Greacen discussed the emergence of an “interesting and ... vital number of young men, most of whom have been brought together through the medium of *The New Northman*”, and welcomes a “new school of Irish poetry” in the north. Ruddick Miller issued a scathing reply: “how many members of the general public had heard before of the majority of the literary ‘lights’ disclosed and displayed by Mr. Greacen? Very few ... it is the general public and not a small ‘arty’ clique that has to be impressed”. See Millar, “Ulster and its writers.” *Belfast Telegraph*, 18.08.1941.

Corporation binman astutely enquired, ‘that they do not see, or that they dodge it?’.⁵⁷

Greagoir Ó Dúill’s essay, “No rootless colonists : Samuel Ferguson and John Hewitt” (1991), is relevant to Carnduff’s enquiry. Ó Dúill queried “how many lines of poetry of social realism ... Hewitt wrote despite the fact that it was the fashion of his youth and the duty of his ideology”.⁵⁸ Seeing a certain inevitability in Hewitt’s being ignored by “Unionists” who then robbed him of his “career prize”, Ó Dúill’s indictment of Hewitt’s failure to conform to ideological ‘duty’ is peremptory but instructive. Hewitt *was* officially censured in 1935, but for lack of professional integrity, not for being at the “anarchist end” of the socialist spectrum. Longley’s attempts to link progenitive “evangelical origins of the Irish Literary Revival” to a “missionary spirit” in Hewitt’s mobilising of “proletarian writers [and educating] Ulster Young Farmers about their poetic heritage” flounder before evidence that he was embarrassed to encounter working men “denounc[ing] Ulster writers for not facing up to political realities”, and that he tended to patronise farmers with homilies like, ‘Man does not live by cattle judging alone’.⁵⁹ Hewitt was not, as Longley claims,

⁵⁷ T. Carnduff, “Belfast is an Irish city”, *The Bell*, 18, 1, (April 1952), 6.

⁵⁸ G. Ó Dúill, “No rootless colonists : Samuel Ferguson and John Hewitt”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 106.

⁵⁹ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1991), 126, J. Hewitt and R. McFadden, “International-PEN in Dublin”, *The Bell*, 18, 12 (Autumn 1953), 77, and J. Hewitt, “Poetry and you”, *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2, 8, (1948), 21-22.

disillusioned by “theoretical and literary socialists”. Rather, he admitted he found it difficult to talk to the “literate but not educated ... plumber in Coleraine”, and dismissed factory workers and their families as impervious to the “tangle of aesthetic theory”.⁶⁰ Hewitt’s conservatism is significant beside David McDowell’s observation that traditionally, “political unionism ... dourly left culture to the clever folk in velvet smoking jackets”.⁶¹ McDowell’s remark deftly reassigns the complacency Mooney identified as the sole prerogative of the “Unionist establishment and the kaleyard provincials”, and enhances too the evidence of McFadden’s comment that Hewitt ‘endorsed progressive thought and unpopular causes, but ... did not offer dedication’.⁶² As Hewitt’s forty years’ Council service signifies, his cultural ambitions failed to transcend existing civic structures; his pursuit of marriage between ‘planners’ and ‘artists’ mimicked precisely Arnold’s axiomatic impulse towards ‘State’ as the ‘expression ... of our best self’.⁶³

⁶⁰ J. Hewitt quoted in J. Evans, “Profile of John Hewitt : ‘Now poetry is what I’m about’”, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 29-08-1968, 6, and “Proposals for Coventry art collection”, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 01.11.1957. In “Alec of the Chimney Corner” (1968), Hewitt confessed his inability to communicate successfully with the “roaring fundamentalists and the niggling literalists ... [of] ... Ulster working-class nonconformists”.

⁶¹ D. McDowell, “Historical gerrymandering : the abuse of the past”, I. Adamson, D. Hume and D. McDowell, *Cuchulain, The Lost Legend : Ulster, The Lost Culture*, (1995), 21.

⁶² R. McFadden, “No dusty pioneer”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place* (1991), 180. (A revised version of an essay published in *Threshold*, 30 (Winter 1986/87)).

⁶³ M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (1893), 159.

In 1968, however, the coincidence of the Troubles and launch of the *Honest Ulsterman* provided Hewitt with a context and platform to redeploy the myth of his 'victimisation' and secure the attention of a 'home' audience. *Honest Ulsterman's* early volumes offered an iconoclastic exposé of the 'Orange Bigot'. Volume one carried Hewitt's 'From the Tibetan' (1968) and Mahon's 'Ecclesiastes', twin satires on the "bleak afflatus" and "ritual ... chanting" of the bibliophobic "lamas" of Protestant cultures. Significantly, 'From the Tibetan' (1968) lampoons "loyalist" musical traditions, parading them as crude cousins of the "Douanier-like conceptions" Hewitt observed in "loyalist" street art in 1951. In June, 'Lines for a dead Alderman' (1953) blatantly petitioned a troubled context. Originally written as an epitaph for Chairman Tougher in 1953, the revised, retitled and previously unpublished 'Elegy for an enemy' exhumed the "rascal" who had finally "had his day"; betraying Hewitt's tragic self-conceit it concluded, "the earth may never be rid / of his malice this side of time / if I let it tarnish my rime". Simultaneous with the release of *Collected Poems* (1968), August's *Honest Ulsterman* printed "Alec of the Chimney Corner" (1968), Hewitt's account of Alexander Irvine's bestowing on him the duty of "torchbearer" for social justice. Arguably, this was an astute moment for a competitive spirit to exploit the priestly blessing, and in September coincidence turned to farce with the publication of Hewitt's dramatic martyrological memoir of persecution and despair.

In the event, *Collected Poems* (1968) was received with critical indifference and as Roberta Hewitt's Journal records, like *No Rebel Word* (1948) it was eventually remaindered.⁶⁴ Hewitt was bitterly disappointed.⁶⁵ Reviewing *Collected Poems*, Douglas Sealy observed, "no particular brilliance in the handling of words; the rhymes are so unemphatic as to pass almost un-noticed ... Mr. Hewitt's verse is not exciting, he makes no attempt to woo his readers by art". Ironically counterpointing Hewitt's approach to Lavery, Sealy asked, "is it merely the voice of the Ulster Protestant ... The Puritan dislike of show and distrust of art may be responsible for the plainness of the line?"⁶⁶ Despite the poor critical response to *Collected Poems*, by 1969 Hewitt's image as "artist beset by bigots" had gathered a mythological impetus that superseded indifference to his prosaic style. Reviewing *Collected Poems*, Seamus Heaney observed that Hewitt was "evolving into a man without a mask"; saluting local 'Funeral rites', Heaney's remark that he was "shouldered out of his island on to 'The Mainland'" symbolised Hewitt's elevation to Protestant martyr.⁶⁷ By 1992, Ormsby had hailed Hewitt as an important "exemplar and influence" and *Collected Poems* as a "poetic milestone of the 1960s".⁶⁸

⁶⁴R. Hewitt, Journal, 14.08.1950. Granada Publishing to R. Hewitt, TLS, 11.06.1971. PRONI.

⁶⁵J. Hewitt to M. Longley, ALS, 08.02.1969. PRONI.

⁶⁶D. Sealy, "An individual flavour", *Dublin Magazine*, 8, (Spring/Summer 1969), 19-24, passim.

⁶⁷S. Heaney, "The poetry of John Hewitt", *Threshold*, 22, (Summer 1969), 77.

Ormsby's comments reflect the unhindered progress of Hewitt's 'mythologies', and his considerable status as an icon of liberalism. It is ironic, therefore, that by 1971 Hewitt had begun to wish "people wouldn't keep on referring even obliquely to my 'victimisation'"⁶⁹ and, writing privately to McFadden one year later, that he confessed himself "a teeny bit less tolerant of national ideals".⁷⁰ Significantly, through service on the Arts Council, Hewitt established a productive relationship with Blackstaff press and by the mid 1970s was being regularly published by them. Hewitt appeared to almost simultaneously abandon "liberal initiatives pioneered under the 'Cultural Traditions' umbrella".⁷¹ Writing privately to a Miss Craig in 1976, Hewitt claimed that *The Planter and the Gael* (1970) had been a "chance coming together" that had "misled some ... [because] ... John Montague is ... in the transatlantic tradition ... John Hewitt ... is in the English tradition - Crabbe, Wordsworth, Edward Thomas".⁷² Three months after being appointed writer in residence at Queen's University in January 1977, Hewitt reminisced that going into "voluntary exile" had been the best

⁶⁸ F. Ormsby, Introduction, *A Rage for Order : Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, (1992).

⁶⁹ J. Hewitt quoted in K. Jamison, "A personal reminiscence by Kenneth Jamison, Director of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland", S. Flanagan, ed., *A Poet's Pictures*, (1987), 8.

⁷⁰ J. Hewitt to R. McFadden, ALS, 31.05.1972, 15.11.1972.

⁷¹ R. English, "Suggesting doubts to the influential : Some reflections on cultural traditions", *Irish Review*, 15, (1994), 97-106, passim.

⁷² J. Hewitt to Miss Craig, ALS, 17.14.1976, PRONI.

thing he had ever done, he had enjoyed being among “civilised people”.⁷³ Eight years later, Hewitt declared that the Irish people “before my ancestors came here, were a tribe of cattle-rustlers, fighting each other and burning churches and what not”.⁷⁴ Having been vice-president of the Irish Academy of Letters and received honorary doctorates at Queen’s and Coleraine, in 1983 Hewitt somewhat controversially accepted the freedom of the city from which he had previously declared himself spurned. Ironically, in 1985 after fruitfully exploiting his ‘victimisation’ for more than thirty years, Hewitt denounced Yeats’ mythology as “bogus”.⁷⁵ This evidence suggests that, when it is investigated within a chronological framework, Hewitt’s radicalism evinced a “dangerous” edge only when sharpened by personal bitterness. Equally, it highlights his ‘disciples’ failure to apply this framework scrupulously when analysing both Hewitt’s place in Northern Irish writing and his relationship to the ‘kaleyard provincials’. Could it be as Roy McFadden observed in ‘The land of saints and scholars’ (1943) that:

⁷³ Literature Committee Minutes, Arts Council Northern Ireland, TDS, 25.01.1977, Public Record Office Northern Ireland. N. Kiely, “John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock”, *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977.

⁷⁴ K. Levine, “A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent”, *Fortnight*, 213 (February 1985), 16-17.

⁷⁵ D. Smyth, “So much older then ... younger than that now”, *North*, 4 (Winter 1985), 15.

We have betrayed them one and all.
 The Dublin intellectual,
 The Belfast bigot, have become
 The character of Irishdom.

Written in 1943, 'The land of saints and scholars' is topical when scrutinising criticism of Northern Irish Protestant writers during the first decade of the Troubles. Specifically, when Hewitt's amazing rise from obscurity to 'daddy of them all' is compared to the simultaneous, increasingly negative stereotyping of Samuel Ferguson, it exposes the malign influence of partisan concerns on critical approaches to Protestant cultures.⁷⁶

⁷⁶James Simmons named John Hewitt "father of modern Ulster poetry". See Simmons, "Some notes on the origins of *The Honest Ulsterman*", *Honest Ulsterman*, 95, (1993), 7.

CHAPTER 2

SAMUEL FERGUSON AND THE 'HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION'.

Between 1832 and 1886, Samuel Ferguson contributed a substantial body of original writing and English translations of Irish poetry to Irish literature. In 1832, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published Ferguson's first major poem, 'The forging of the anchor', and Christopher North's negative critique of Alfred Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*.¹ Ferguson's polemical internal monologue, *Dialogue Between the Head and the Heart of an Irish Protestant* (1833), was published in the same year as Robert Browning's first poem 'Pauline'. Reappraising Ferguson in 1989, Robert Welch remarks that he cannot be compared or contrasted with British, Victorian literati because he does not have a language to relate in "confident awareness" that there is such a thing as a "coherent tradition". Welch considers Ferguson's language to be, "agitated by so many considerations, political, cultural, propagandist, sectarian ... [that it] ... cannot open out to become a system of representation for a mind fully engaged with, fully informed by life".² Welch's comments characterise an

¹J. H. Buckley, *Tennyson : The Growth of a Poet*, (1974), 44. North dismissed the "distinguished silliness" of Tennyson's poems as "too slight to deserve invidious attention". In *Samuel Ferguson : The Literary Achievement*, (1990), 9, P. Denman notes that Ferguson's earliest pieces were printed in *Ulster Magazine* between March 1830 and April 1831.

²R. Welch, "Constitution, language and tradition in nineteenth-century Irish poetry", T. Brown and N. Grene, eds., *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, (1989), 25, 26.

ideological confusion between the languages of politics and criticism that is endemic to Irish commentary, and glosses what is arguably its most enervating and largely unchallenged truism: that lack of a 'national tradition' limits authorial imagination. A persistent and illiberal attachment to the Protestant writer of the designations 'Planter', 'Ulsterman', 'Calvinist', 'Ulster Presbyterian', 'Anglo-Irishman', 'Unionist', 'Loyalist', 'Dissenter' animates the truism, confirms a negative preoccupation with the writer's putative lack of national identity, and qualifies his contribution to Irish literature. Rarely are non-Catholic, Irish writers called simply Irishmen or Northern Irishmen. Rarer still, since Field Day's publication of Seamus Heaney's 'Open Letter' (1983), are they called British.³

Critical angst towards Irish Protestant identities derives from political tensions that challenge partiality in approaches to a writer like Ferguson, who engaged robustly with Ireland's cultural and political concerns through, for example, his *Dialogue*, polemical essays and original poetry. Specifically, critics rarely attempt to invoke the spirit of Ferguson's idiosyncratic engagement with his nineteenth century context. Rather, Ferguson's artistic range and ingenuity are frequently diminished because they are adumbrated through the "cracked lookingglass" of contemporary jousts for cultural supremacy. The influence of internecine struggle is

³ S. Heaney, "An Open Letter", D. Donoghue, ed., *Ireland's Field Day* (1985), 83.

evident in three studies of Ferguson by Robert O'Driscoll. Developing from a journal essay in 1965 to a critical monograph in 1976, O'Driscoll's readings of Ferguson parallel the emergence of a partisan approach to Irish Protestant writers generally.

In O'Driscoll's first study, "Two voices : one beginning" (1965), the 'two voices' of the title are those of W. B. Yeats and Ferguson. O'Driscoll wrote the essay to mark the centenaries of Yeats' birth and the publication of Ferguson's *Lays of the Western Gael*. O'Driscoll declared *Lays of the Western Gael* a volume that more than any other, "both anticipated and influenced the later course of Irish literary events ... the importance of which it is difficult to over-estimate in the history of modern Anglo-Irish literature". O'Driscoll's appraisal of Ferguson is eulogistic; he is judged an important pioneer of the Irish literary revival, and to have "consciously furnished later poets with a model where simplicity had not been sacrificed to sophistication nor truth to convention". O'Driscoll uses a quotation by Ferguson to create a significant echo of his essay title, and to complete the genealogical metaphor of the 'born-again' tradition it signifies: "I don't despair at all for my country ... I am old, but, if I do not see it, I shall close my eyes in the faith of her resurrection".⁴ O'Driscoll contends that Ferguson's work was, for Yeats in particular, an important artistic link

⁴ S. Ferguson to W. Allingham, 05.12.1884, quoted in M. C. Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 1, (1896), 360.

between a reawakened Irish national literary consciousness, and the 'broken tradition' that was submerged with the near death of the Irish language. O'Driscoll implies that the only "two currents" to buffet Ferguson's career were his rejection of the "popular taste for political literature", and his decision to isolate himself from English criticism and concentrate on poetry "based on Irish legend".⁵ O'Driscoll enhances this positive portrait of Ferguson by quoting Yeats' view of him in "The poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson" (1886) as, the "greatest poet Ireland has produced ... the most central ... the most Celtic", and reinforces it using Ferguson's words:

I ... must be content to go my own ways leaving undone a great deal that I ought to have done; but I have lived, and loved, and done something if not all that I might ... [to make] ... the voice of this despised people of ours heard high up Olympus.

In 1965 in "Two voices : one beginning", O'Driscoll does not challenge Ferguson's use of kinship metaphors through which he identifies with "this despised people of ours", or make an issue of his Protestant faith and Northern roots. By contrast, after the Troubles re-emerged in 1968, poetry and sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland drew world-wide critical attention. Subjected to what Edna Longley has described as the, "political

⁵In "The poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson", *Dublin University Review*, (November 1886), 923-941, W. B. Yeats maintained that, had Ferguson's subject matter been British, Arthurian legend and not Irish sagas, he would have attracted more universal critical acclaim.

and theoretical batteries pounding away since 1970”,⁶ a dominant motif could be discerned in much critical writing which was developed from folklore surrounding a group of eighteenth century, radical Presbyterians. Inspired by the French Revolution and the American War of Independence, these founded the United Irish Society, attempted to head a rebellion against Britain and were crushed by it in 1798.⁷

In 1971, O’Driscoll’s second essay, “Ferguson and the idea of an Irish national literature”, reflects the influence of the heroic myths attaching to the 1798 rebellion. While this study contains much of the material in “Two voices : one beginning” (1965), its title signifies a modified approach to Ferguson that implicitly places him at one oblique but unmistakable remove from the “idea”. O’Driscoll begins by linking two forces that generated the “conscious movement for an Irish national literature”. The first is the publication of James Macpherson’s translations of the, “authentic poems of Ossian” in the 1760s, and the second is the romantic, revolutionary fervour of the United Irish Society. O’Driscoll contends that the former had a “profound” influence on European literature, and that the latter inspired the educational ideals of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution in the nineteenth century [Inst]. O’Driscoll acknowledges Ferguson as the “first

⁶ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 20.

⁷ In *Irish Literature : A Social History*, (1990), 122, N. Vance notes that, after the middle of the nineteenth century, Ireland’s “obsession with the radicalism of the United Irishmen faded and folk-memory and heroic myth took over”.

influential Anglo-Irish poet to preserve in his English translations the shape, sound, and sentiment of his Irish originals”. Conversely, O’Driscoll regrets the failure of Inst’s “educational ideals” to modify Ferguson’s, “intolerance for his Roman Catholic countrymen and deep distrust of the motives of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland”. Intriguingly, however, O’Driscoll suggests that, although he was “separated ... from the Irish people by background, taste, and temperament”, Ferguson’s dislike of Catholicism was overcome by his greater love for Ireland.⁸ O’Driscoll cites two quotations from Ferguson’s correspondence to Blackwood as evidence and highlights them as follows:

“I am an Irishman and a Protestant” [Ferguson] writes in an unpublished letter, but “I was an Irishman before I was a Protestant”.

O’Driscoll presents Ferguson’s remarks as a single sentence in one unpublished letter. Problematically, as O’Driscoll’s correct citations in his chapter notes reveal, he is in fact combining two unconnected phrases written twenty years apart. Ferguson’s comment, “I was an Irishman before I was a Protestant”, is taken from his letter to Robert Blackwood in April 1838.⁹ Ferguson wrote to Blackwood outlining his response to a book

⁸R. O’Driscoll, “Ferguson and the idea of an Irish national literature”, *Eire-Ireland*, 6, (Spring 1971), 83.

⁹S. Ferguson to R. Blackwood, ALS, 09.04.1838. National Library of Scotland. [NLS]

published by a certain Dr. Mayhew. Clearly impressed, Ferguson observed that the unidentified book propelled a “hard hit against the government”, but confided to Blackwood why he dare not take it up as the subject of a paper:

I don't go the whole hog with the Orangemen (always remembering that I was an Irishman before I was a Protestant).

This evidence of principled scruple goes against Malcolm Brown's remark in *Sir Samuel Ferguson* (1973) that Ferguson was an “old Orange sectary”. (98) Brown observes, “Ferguson's own purity was not merely suspect, but unequivocally stained, and a clear Orange too. His governing purpose was artistic, but did not rest there, since it aimed to pre-empt the cultural assets available to the slowly-awakening Catholic peasantry”. (59) The evidence of Ferguson's original letter to Blackwood in 1858, from which O'Driscoll takes the first part of his quotation, “I am an Irishman and a Protestant”, does not support Brown's charge of cultural imperialism. Writing to “My dear Blackwood” (1858), Ferguson apologised for his tardiness in correcting manuscripts, and asked Blackwood to publish his satirical work, ‘Father Tom and the Pope’, anonymously because, he as explained, he didn't “aspire to any of the honours of a martyr”. Ferguson continued:

I have two great misfortunes. I am an Irishman and a Protestant. The one keeps me out of favour with the castle, and the other out of favour with the church.¹⁰

When Ferguson's two unrelated comments, made in 1838 and 1858 respectively, are investigated in their proper contexts they provide evidence that O'Driscoll's use of them in his analysis of Ferguson's *raison d'être* is inappropriate. Specifically, O'Driscoll concludes that, "consequently in 1833 [Ferguson's] interest in the welfare of his country was such as to lead him to investigate the literary legacy of his Catholic countrymen". O'Driscoll's "consequently" is unsound. First, beside the evidence of Ferguson's note to Blackwood in December 1832, where he expressed regret that his "influence among the Belfast newspaper editors has been so compromised by [his] neutrality in their several electioneering wars", these quotations affirm that he sustained a doggedly independent attitude to his country and his work over a twenty-six year period.¹¹ Second, in *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day* (1896) M. C. Ferguson notes that by 1832 Ferguson was studying Irish "in a private class".¹² The

¹⁰ S. Ferguson to Blackwood, ALS, 16.08.1858, NLS. Possibly, "honours" should read "humours".

¹¹ S. Ferguson to Blackwood, ALS, 07.12.1832. NLS.

¹² In *Presbyterians and the Irish Language*, (1996), 155, R. Blaney comments, "much of [Ferguson's] poetry was translated from the Irish, which language he learned in Belfast and which was perhaps introduced to him by his old teacher the Rev. Reuben Bryce, Principal of Belfast Academy and co-secretary of the Ulster Gaelic Society, who ran Irish classes in the Academy. Later, in 1833, [Ferguson] belonged to a small group in Belfast who formed a private class to learn Irish ... This study of Irish had a major influence on the subsequent career of Ferguson. The group made literal translations of

evidence of Ferguson's letter to Blackwood in 1832 shows that he had sufficient reputation to attract commissions to translate Irish material and that he was able and eager to "succumb to the strange vigour of the original[s]".¹³ While in 1833 Ferguson modestly remarked to Blackwood that he was "but a grammar scholar in Irish as yet", a short time later he told George Petrie he had "translated all [he] want[ed] of Hardiman".¹⁴ Ferguson's critique of *Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy*, which was published in 1834 in the *Dublin University Magazine*, also indicates proficiency in the Irish language. Beside this evidence it might be deduced that Ferguson had a less than whimsical intention toward, "the literary legacy of his Catholic

Irish classics and he was delegated the task of expressing these translations in verse". Evaluating evidence of Ferguson's knowledge of Irish, Blaney concludes that, "armed with a grammar and dictionary, he would have little difficulty in deciphering and experiencing the original material for himself". See also J. Magee, "The teaching of Irish history in schools", *The Irish Teacher*, (Winter 1970), 18. Magee writes, "For many Ulstermen Irish culture and Irish separatism had become synonymous terms". Magee regrets this led to an "astonishing antipathy towards the Irish language - though it involved a rejection of a field of scholarship in which Ulster Protestants such as Charlotte Brooke, Bishop Reeves, Samuel Bryson, Robert MacAdam, Sir Samuel Ferguson and Margaret Dobbs are only some of the most prominent names." G. Ó Dúill notes Ferguson's knowledge of Irish remained limited, that he "diminished his own creativity to become a conscious and conscientious reworker of the older material". See "Samuel Ferguson : an introduction to his life and work", *Fortnight*, 322, (November 1993), 8.

¹³ S. Ferguson to Blackwood, 8.04.1832. NLS.

¹⁴ S. Ferguson, quoted in M. C. Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 1, (1896), 36. Ferguson responded to Blackwood's "desire of having a Sea Piece". See S. Ferguson to W. Blackwood, ALS, 08.04.1832, and 31.05.1833, NLS, and Ferguson quoted in M. C. Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 1, (1896), 42.

countrymen". Rather, it points to a systematic, scholarly commitment and the acquisition of professionally acknowledged achievements.¹⁵

In 1976, O'Driscoll begins *An Ascendancy of the Heart : Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Irish Literature in English* with a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson's book *The Wrecker* (1906 (1892)). Stevenson's character, 'Mac', assaults an Australian for calling him an Irishman. Responding to the Australian's perplexed question, "But you *are* an Irishman, aint you?" [Stevenson's emphasis], the "Ulsterman" declares, "I may be ... but I'll allow no Sydney duck to call me so. No ... nor any Britisher that walks".¹⁶ Noting George Birmingham's remark in *The Lighter Side of Irish Life* (1911) that the pugilistic 'Mac' was a "characteristic nineteenth-century Ulster Protestant", O'Driscoll juxtaposes Stevenson's caricature with the "startling" words of that other "nineteenth-century Ulsterman", Samuel Ferguson. The "startling words" are those he quoted in 1971 in "Ferguson and the idea of an Irish national literature", and he arranges them as follows:

"I am an Irishman and a Protestant," Samuel Ferguson writes, but "I was an Irishman before I was a Protestant."

¹⁵ In *Samuel Ferguson : The Literary Achievement*, 8, P. Denman judged Ferguson's art, "a poetics of scholarship".

¹⁶ O'Driscoll quotes from R. L. Stevenson and L. Osbourne, *The Wrecker*, (New York 1906), 480.

O'Driscoll embellishes Ferguson's words with a biographical note that the "Belfast Unionist" was born in 1810 into a Belfast where "the ideals of the United Irish Society still lingered". Clearly, in 1976 O'Driscoll seeks to exploit the symbolism of his title, *An Ascendancy of the Heart*. Deftly separating Ferguson's Protestantism from his Irishness, O'Driscoll invests with emotion the genesis of his commitment to Irish studies, and tries to reconcile that genesis to the exclusivist consciousness of a romantic world vision. Attempting to validate this portrait, O'Driscoll re-evaluates Ferguson's "youthful effulgences" on the privileges of Protestantism, and his distrust of the Catholic clergy as an "intellectual defence of abstract principles". There is, however, an alternative view of Ferguson which is that he was a child of the Enlightenment born into an Ireland firmly secured to Britain by the Act of Union (1801). Following on this, when his original correspondence is scrutinised closely and investigated in its proper context, it reveals the particular difficulties he met throughout his writing life as an Irishman by birth, and as a Protestant by conviction. Arguably, therefore, Ferguson's comments reflect his compulsion to assert a moral right to embrace the intellectual freedom he considered synonymous with Protestantism, and thereby remain, in his own words, "civilly free".¹⁷

¹⁷ S. Ferguson, "Our portrait gallery - No. 42. Thomas Davis", *Dublin University Magazine*, 29, (January 1847), 192.

O'Driscoll's changing approaches to Ferguson reflect the influence of sectarian politics. In 1965 in "Two voices : one beginning", O'Driscoll commended Ferguson as "the originator, of the Irish literary revival" and disregarded his religion and politics.¹⁸ In 1971 in "Ferguson and the idea of an Irish national literature", O'Driscoll's references to the United Irish Rebellion, his emphasis on Ferguson's religion, his reordering of Ferguson's correspondence, and his designation of him as the first influential "Anglo-Irish poet to preserve ... the shape, sound, and sentiment of his Irish originals", mark this later approach as being covertly political.¹⁹ In 1976 in *An Ascendancy of the Heart : Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Irish Literature in English*, O'Driscoll mobilises material from the earlier essays through a 'naming' process; by juxtaposing the negative image of Stevenson's caricature Ulsterman with Ferguson, the "Protestant", "Belfast Unionist", O'Driscoll presents Ferguson as a fully fledged cultural nationalist who, in the 1830s, "initiated an attempt to reconcile the two religious communities that constitute the Irish nation".²⁰

¹⁸R. O'Driscoll, "Two voices : one beginning", *Dublin University Review*, 3, 8, (1965), 93.

¹⁹R. O'Driscoll, "Ferguson and the idea of an Irish national literature", *Eire-Ireland*, 6, (Spring 1971), 85 .

²⁰R. O'Driscoll, *An Ascendancy of the Heart : Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Irish Literature in English*, (1976), 15.

Reviewing *An Ascendancy of the heart : Ferguson and the Beginning of Modern Irish Literature in English*, W. J. McCormack remarked that O'Driscoll's title was "too ingenuous by half - too neglectful of those unromantically cerebral qualities on which literary history must depend".²¹ Following on this, there is evidence that Ferguson took a rather more pragmatic view of the potential for reconciliation between Protestant and Catholic Ireland than that asserted by O'Driscoll in *An Ascendancy of the heart* (1976). In "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy No. 4" (1834) Ferguson declared that, even if the Irish Roman Catholic was "up to his knees in a drift of anti-popish tracts", "pelted with bibles" by the Missionary association, and the last priest were celebrating the last mass on the "southernmost extremity of Cape Clear", he very much doubted there would be any beneficial outcome.²² Ferguson's comments resound with a definitively anti-romantic pragmatism that is equally buoyant in his internal monologue, *The Dialogue Between the Head and the Heart of an Irish Protestant* (1833). 'Head' archly enquires of 'Heart' whether it is "injury to introduce the religion of the Bible for the fictions and traditions of

²¹ W. J. McCormack, Review, *An Ascendancy of the heart : Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Irish Literature in English*, *Irish University Review*, 1, (1976), 123-126, passim.

²² S. Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy No. 4", *Dublin University Magazine*, 23, (November 1834), 4, 520. Ferguson's comment is interesting beside F. Holmes' note of a priest's address to the Irish evangelical Society's annual meeting in 1928, "you might as well attempt to move the earth, as to check the progress of Catholicity in Ireland". See Holmes, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*, (1985), 114.

designing man?”. ‘Heart’ replies, “I cannot argue. I can only feel that, in the heart of a mere Irishman, I would have rebelled against the forced favour”. Ferguson’s alliterative playfulness in *Dialogue* and his comments in “Hardiman’s Irish Minstrelsy No. 4” are inimical to a context where the religious fervour of the ‘Second Reformation’ testified to a resurgent, evangelical belief in religious solutions to Ireland’s political problems; and where the prevailing view deemed that the way of solving its difficulties was, in David Hempton and Myrtle Hill’s words, “conversion of the majority to Protestantism rather than concession to ... their political demands”.²³ Accordingly, when it is interpreted in context, Ferguson’s pragmatism articulated a distinctly anarchic independence from both reactionary and revolutionary romantic aspirations in the Ireland of his day. Indeed, considered beside the evidence of Ferguson’s artful irreverence, Breandan Ó Buachalla’s remark that *Dialogue*, “tortuously addresses ... an overt reflex of the irreconcilable conflict within” is simplistic.²⁴

Critical approaches to Ferguson frequently reflect the influence of the social and political concerns that direct O’Driscoll’s essays. In *Northern Voices* (1975), for example, Terence Brown denounced Ferguson’s

²³ D. Hempton and M. Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, (1992), 86. For a discussion on the vibrant, unprecedented expansion of evangelicalism and ultramontaniam in the 19c. see F. Holmes, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*, (1985).

²⁴ B. Ó Buachalla, “The Gaelic background”, T. Brown and B. Hayley, eds., *Samuel Ferguson : A Centenary Tribute*, (1987), 39.

“contempt for the vulgarity of Catholic political aspirations”. Brown argued that Ferguson “establish[ed] his own view of the ideal Celt” in “react[ion] to his coloniser’s position and ... standard romantic nationalist tendencies”.

(32) In *Writing Ireland* (1988), David Cairns and Shaun Richards interpreted nineteenth-century Irish ‘Ascendancy’ intellectuals through a Marxist perspective. They contended that “the moves of the colonizers towards the politics and culture of the colonized are motivated by the desire to achieve influence through an act of association and appropriation rather than identification and (self) absorption”. Investigating the United Irishmen’s rebellion as a failed attempt to achieve a “Republic based on non-sectarian political ... egalitarianism”, Cairns and Richards use a quotation from Ferguson as evidence to support their argument and suggest that it is “fundamental” to understanding the writer and his fellow revivalists in the “conflictual moment” of the early nineteenth century.²⁵ Acknowledging O’Driscoll as their source, Cairns and Richards pinpoint that “conflictual moment” and elaborate on Ferguson’s response to it as follows:

Writing to a friend in 1858 Sir Samuel Ferguson declared “I am an Irishman and a Protestant”, but then, more problematically, went on: “I was an Irishman before I was a Protestant”. (O’Driscoll, 1976, 15)

²⁵ D. Cairns and S. Richards, “Pages like this our field”, *Writing Ireland : Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, (1988), 22-41, passim.

Based on the evidence of this quotation, Cairns and Richards introduce a study of Ferguson that seeks to undermine M. C. Ferguson's statement that her husband was "not at any period of his life a 'party' man", and to portray Ferguson as a "poet and Protestant propagandist". They insist that Ferguson, "when obliged to acknowledge the near-genocidal dimension of colonialism ... dispatches its brutalities to the mists of time". (26) Arguably, Cairns' and Richards' reading of Ferguson runs counter to the evidence of his remark in "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy No. 4" (1834) that, "even after three hundred years' subjection, or alliance, we can understand an Irish Roman Catholic's hatred, nay, a mere Orangeman, although a Protestant, may be conceived of as being sore upon the subject of English domination at times".²⁶

In *Writing Ireland*, Ferguson is interpreted solely within the parameters of twentieth century Marxist ideology, an approach which inevitably diminishes the range and depth of his emotional attachment to Ireland and the development of its literary history. Cairns and Richards do not engage with contemporary reappraisals of the Presbyterian radicals by, for example, David Hempton and Myrtle Hill or Nancy Curtin, as an educated elite for which Catholic Emancipation, long before the rebellion in 1798,

²⁶ S. Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy No. 4", *Dublin University Magazine*, 23, 4 (November 1834), 520.

was the “rock upon which [its] fragile unity perished”.²⁷ Applying too narrow a focus, Cairns and Richards assert a negative contrast between nineteenth century Protestant intellectuals generally - and Ferguson in particular - and their ‘radical’ forebears. Harnessed to a theory of the nineteenth century as a ‘tradition-free’ time zone in Irish literary history, Cairns’ and Richards’ reading of Ferguson is indicative of a wider tendency to reconcile contemporary Irish culture with its ‘origins’, and sever it from a legacy of “deforming colonisation”.²⁸ The same critical impulse is evident in Frank Ormsby’s designation of Ferguson a descendant of “Scottish planters”, and as being “significantly transitional” in the history of Irish literature, and in M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh’s numbering this writer of “Scottish planter stock” with the “traditionless poets” of the nineteenth century.²⁹

O’Driscoll, and Cairns and Richards use the same evidence to offer seemingly irreconcilable conclusions on Ferguson’s contribution to

²⁷ D. Hempton and M. Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, (1992), 25. For detailed analysis of “the transformation of the United Irishmen from middle-class reformers into militant revolutionaries”, see N. Curtin, “The transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a mass-based revolutionary organisation, 1794-6”, *Irish Historical Studies*, 14, 96, (1985), 463-492.

²⁸ In *The Living Stream*, 13, Edna Longley castigated Field Day’s tendency towards, “explicit, interpretationist cultural politics” since 1980.

²⁹ F. Ormsby, Introduction, *Poets from the North of Ireland*, (1979). Curiously, despite an editorial commitment to “celebrate the values of art in times of violence”, Ormsby does not include Ferguson in *A Rage for Order*, : *Poetry of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (1992), Ferguson’s ‘Lament for Thomas Davis’, ‘At the Polo-Ground’ and ‘In Carey’s footsteps’ seem particularly relevant. See also M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, “Sir Samuel Ferguson : poet and ideologue” for a discussion of Ferguson’s importance “in the cultural and intellectual history of nineteenth-century Ireland”, and T. Brown and B. Hayley, eds., *Samuel Ferguson : A Centenary Tribute*, 4.

Ireland's literary history. O'Driscoll's *Ascendancy of the Heart* (1976) depicts Ferguson as a cultural nationalist whose romantic identification with Ireland leads him to set aside his Protestant integrity and embrace an Irish identity. Arguably, O'Driscoll's theme implies that the abandonment of a distinctive Irish Protestant integrity is a prerequisite for 'Irishness'. Conversely, in *Writing Ireland*, Cairns and Richards portray Ferguson as a cultural imperialist and traduce his artistry as propagandist.³⁰ Remarkably, however, both critiques are united in their concern with Protestantism as an enduring symbol of an alien cultural dominance in Ireland.³¹ Such emphases effectively diminish Ferguson's status. As Cairns and Richards note, by the closing decades of the nineteenth-century, a reformed and re-invigorated Catholic Church and Catholicism was a "fundamental constituent of the people-nation ... [to which Irish] ... writers of the 1890s and 1900s needed to refer if they were to "forge a sentimental connection with this people-nation". (63) If the period superseded by this reincarnation of a Gaelic, Catholic nation is reduced to one of transition, then Cairns' and Richards'

³⁰ D. Cairns and S. Richards, *Writing Ireland : Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, (1988), 26. In *Improprieties : politics and sexuality in Northern Irish Poetry*, (1993), 88,89, C. Wills defers to Cairns' and Richards' reading of Ferguson: "the political domination of the Irish has been intimately connected with a cultural imperialism, exemplified by writings such as those of Ferguson and Arnold". Similarly, in "Arnold Ferguson Schiller : aesthetic culture and the politics of aesthetics", *Cultural Critique*, 2, (1986), 155, D. Lloyd suggested that Ferguson's attempt to create a, "synthesis of aesthetic and ethnological criticism, to appropriate Hardiman's material to a conservative vision of political resolution to Irish problems ... markedly prefigures Arnold's".

³¹ T. Nairn's, *The Break-Up of Britain*, (1977) offers useful commentary on neo-nationalist views of Irish Protestants.

retrospective on Ferguson as “poet and Protestant propagandist” is doubly ironic. As Damian Smyth remarks, to interpret solely in terms defined by a dominant ideology is often “nothing short of cultural Imperialism”.³²

Ferguson’s central artistic obsession was the relationship between the savage heart and the civilised mind. He dramatised this in ‘Two voices’ (1878) where, debating with ‘Conscience’, ‘Intellectual Soul’ urges blind obedience to God because logic tells him that to do otherwise makes him judge over God. Goaded the direct answer, ‘Conscience’ challenges this casuistry with an impatient “What *feel’st* thou?”. [Ferguson’s emphasis] Responding, ‘Soul’ concedes his humility is a sham because, “I feel - I feel - whatever be decreed, / I much shall need excuse”.³³ In its opening stanza, ‘Two voices’ is clearly defined as a debate. In the subtly crafted pieties of its closure, the polarities of the English Reformation and ensuing era of “subversive individualism” quicken, mobilising the poem’s internal dialectic to temper ‘Soul’s’ humility with self-knowledge and demand individual freedom before the Law: “whatever be decreed”.³⁴ This reading of ‘Two

³² D. Smyth, “Totalising imperative”, Review, *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in *Fortnight*, 309, (September 1992), 26-27.

³³ ‘Soul’s’ mischievous independence is reminiscent of the intellect that informs Robert Browning’s ‘One word more’: “Where the heart lies / Let the Brain lie also”. R. Browning, *Poems*, (1898), 721.

³⁴ In *Poetry and politics in the English Renaissance*, (1984), 36-37, D. Norbrook argues that Reformation reformers, including More, reacted against earlier speculative radicalism, deducing that religious reform would lead to a subversive individualism, while new emphases on inner, spiritual authenticity might raise a confused babel of personal visions and imaginations.

voices' (1878) acknowledges the presence of a guiding intellect that is antithetical to the Job-like humility M. C. Ferguson identifies in the poem.³⁵ Equally, it suggests Peter Denman's view that the "persistent interrogation of Conscience brings Soul to an admission of God's compassion" is prosaic.³⁶

As in 'Two voices', a singular, crafted erudition animates 'Westminster Abbey, on hearing week-day service there, September, 1858'.³⁷ Marking Ferguson's characteristic binding of the language of passion to a formal frame, 'Westminster's' conventional style creates an allegory for Britain's state religion. In its opening stanzas, the magnificent portals of the cardinal religious house of empire panoply the greatness of the state's religious heart; the crusading integrity of Christian imperialism is weighed through a juxtaposition of "Holy Scriptures" with "seven hundred years" of continuity; its success is measured in its finest fruits: "Ten thousand suppliant hands". Reality intrudes on the poem as the magnificence and

³⁵ In *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 2, (1896), 349, M. C. Ferguson contends that Job's acceptance of the arbitrary nature of God's gift of grace, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42⁶), "illustrates Ferguson's experience also".

³⁶ P. Denman, *Samuel Ferguson : The Literary Achievement*, (1990), 167.

³⁷ This title appears in A. P. Graves, ed., *Poems of Sir Samuel Ferguson*, (1916), 81. In Bibliography, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, M. C. Ferguson states that the poem was published by Blackwood, in September, 1863. In *Samuel Ferguson, the Literary Achievement*, (1990), 190, P. Denman notes that Ferguson, "attends weekday service at Westminster Abbey, London, in September, 1856".

mystique of the designing intelligence crumble “back to earth”, allowing the humbler hands of the builders to eclipse the splendour of the stone hands “on high”. Propelled heavenward on a contrapuntal rhythm, the “builded prayer” outstrips the contrasting images to spur a cathartic response, “Fall down, ye bars : enlarge my soul”. This cry symbolises a fervent attempt to banish “pride’s injurious thrall”, surrender to the magnificence, the mystery and the “pull of loyal love” and become the “good servant of the crown” Greagair Ó Dúill holds Ferguson to be.³⁸ Ultimately, in ‘Westminster’ loyal passion is found wanting, its blinding morality is challenged by a haunting, doubting voice of reason identified in the word “yet” that begins, and ends the first line of stanza eight:

Yet hold not lightly home; nor yet
The graves on Dunagore forget;
Nor grudge the stone-gilt stall to change
For humble bench of Gorman’s Grange.

Reflecting the Enlightenment integrity that prompted Tennyson to stun the imperial rhythms of his battle ‘hymn’, ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’ (1854), with the lament “Some one had blunder’d.”,³⁹ in ‘Westminster’, written just four years later, doubt also triumphs. The Abbey’s magnificent

³⁸ G. Ó Dúill, “*Samuel Ferguson : An introduction to his life and work*”, *Fortnight*, 322, (November 1993), 12.

³⁹ A. Tennyson, ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’, C. Ricks, ed., *Tennyson*, (1989), 508-510.

choir stalls are eclipsed by the “stone-gilt”, “humble bench”, and the “graves on Dunagore” are superimposed on the magnificent “tombs of England’s dead”. In decelerating, colloquial, syntactical rhythms, the voice of reason turns the poetic vision homeward to “Gorman’s Grange”, seeking solace with a lesser love: that of the unfettered Christian soul.

In *Sir Samuel Ferguson* (1973) Malcolm Brown declared that after 1848:

[An] artistic change ... came over Ferguson ... the candid gave place to the pompous ... assuming the role of the Ascendancy bard or druid, [he] condescended to share with ‘the perverse rabble’ his formulation of ‘Irishness’: antiquity, manliness ... Anglicanism, aesthetic cleanliness. (97)

In *Samuel Ferguson : The Literary Achievement*, (1990), Denman remarked that the “Presbyterian Ferguson” manipulated the contrasting images of ‘Westminster’s’ metropolitan grandeur and Dunagore’s rustic simplicity to reflect his “perception of the relative states” of England and Ireland. Denman contended that Ferguson sought to “elide ... difference[s] under a shared Christianity” and exploit a setting outside Ireland as a springboard into the Irish past, and interpreted this as evidence that by 1858 his centre of consciousness had shifted towards its “country fields and their mute antiquities”. (100) Brown’s view of Ferguson’s self-transformation and Denman’s reading of ‘Westminster’ (1858) are contradicted by evidence of Ferguson’s thinking in context. It was in 1858, for example, the same year he wrote ‘Westminster’ and ten years after Brown maintains he adopted a

patrician mind set, that Ferguson apprised Blackwood of his distaste for martyrdom and lack of favour from church and castle. Analysed beside this evidence, the pivotal role played in 'Westminster' by the single word "yet", establishes a more complex authorial integrity than Brown's estimate allows.⁴⁰ Looking home from 'Westminster', Ferguson's imagination disregards Denman's "land of mute antiquities"; instead it summons the fellowship of the "seemly chant" of the "village choir", and the "Gospel's joyful sound" that echoes "The Word" down Ferguson's native "moorland glen" from the rebellious, outlawed "souls of kingless, covenanted men". 'Westminster's' simple, parallel rhythms, "we are all like, we all are poor", elude the straight-jacket of Anglican aestheticism, subvert its conventional form and eschew the hierarchical tapestry of Empire by asserting affinity with "poor souls" and "common skies". In this reading of 'Westminster', Ferguson's crucial disavowal of the power centre exemplifies the qualities Michael Watts identified in the dissenter at his best: he is "independent of man, yet dependent on God".⁴¹

⁴⁰In "Humanism Protestantism & English scripture", *Medieval & Renaissance Scripture*, 14, 2, (Fall 1984), 134, J. F. McDiarmid discusses a Protestant progress evolving from belief, moving out to bear fruit, approaching the matter of God's distinctive law only through true spiritual change. McDiarmid contends that repentance in such a context is inner change, not outward penance.

⁴¹M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, (1978), 5.

M. C. Ferguson maintained that, on matters of religion, her husband was not “uniformly orthodox. He thought for himself”.⁴² On matters of politics, Ferguson declared he was a “great detester of Party and Faction, and an implacable enemy of ... projectors and centralisers”. Ferguson’s pursuit of the “loftier superstructure”, defined by him as an “increased spirit of self-reliance [and a] temperate self assertion and national spirit”, underpinned his ambition to “raise the native elements of Irish story to a dignified level”. Ferguson insisted this was “the key to almost all the literary work of ... [his] ... life”.⁴³ Examined in context, this ‘key’ turns on peculiarly Protestant dilemmas, and articulates an Enlightenment scepticism towards nativism and theocentric power.⁴⁴ Beside evidence that since the Troubles Ferguson has increasingly been subjected to partisan criticism, this analysis raises the question of whether it is possible to reconcile his artistry to a modern Ireland of which Seamus Deane observes, “if it could afford pluralism, it would not be the Ireland we know”?⁴⁵ In *Samuel Ferguson : The Literary Achievement* (1990) Peter Denman’s closing part-question, part-statement provides an interesting adjunct to Deane’s remark:

⁴² M. C. Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 2, (1896), 347.

⁴³ S. Ferguson quoted in *ibid.*, 1, 241, 36.

⁴⁴ In *Culture and Imperialism*, (1993), E. Said identifies “nativism” as a demagogic assertion of a native past free from worldly time.

⁴⁵ S. Deane, “Wherever green is read”, M. Ni Dhonnchadha, ed., *Revising the Rising*, (1991), 98.

[Ferguson's] presence, if only as a name to be reached for, ensured that later generations of writers would never be in the same predicament so acutely. But recognizing the presence which he has supplied to Irish writing, it is not too much to ask that we should go to encounter his work with as much openness and commitment as he displayed when taking up the unknown and neglected literature of Ireland. (179)

Denman's comments implicitly rebuke the contemporary, partial criticisms to which Ferguson has been overwhelmingly subjected. Moreover, in his lecture to the 1995 John Hewitt International Summer School, "Literary interactions: Samuel Ferguson's 19th century", Denman objected to John Hewitt's interpretation of Ferguson's 'Mesgedra' (1864) in "The course of writing in Ulster" (1953). Noting that Hewitt "acknowledged Ferguson as an important influence", Denman took issue with his arbitrary reading of 'Mesgedra' as a bald statement of identity, and his limiting remark that "Ferguson's chief value lies in that he recognised his personal position as an Irishman of Ulster Planter stock".⁴⁶ Crucially, Hewitt supported his appraisal of Ferguson by quoting the following lines from 'Mesgedra':

For thou, for them, alas! nor history hast
Nor even tradition; and the man aspires
To link his present with his country's past,
And live anew in knowledge of his sires;

⁴⁶ J. Hewitt, "The course of writing in Ulster" (1953), T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 70.

No rootless colonist of an alien earth,
 Proud but of patient lungs and pliant limb,
 A stranger in the land that gave him birth,
 The land a stranger to itself and him.

Denman countered Hewitt's interpretation by arguing that, since 'Mesgedra' is a Lay based on the Conorian cycle of the Irish heroic tradition and "tells of woman-love and warrior-ruth / And old expectancy of Christ to come.", he had quoted selectively and inappropriately. Addressing Ferguson's sense of identity, Denman cited the writer's passionate attack on self-serving British interference in Irish politics in 1848 as evidence of his "true sense of outrage and ... developed sense of Irish culture". Illustrating from Ferguson's address to the Protestant Repeal Association in 1848, Denman declared that he spoke, "not as an Ulsterman, yes as an Irishman":

We are not a colony of Great Britain - we are an ancient kingdom, an aristocratic people, entitled to our nationality, and resolved on having it; and I trust the day is not far distant when Irishmen will be able to say in reference to their country, as well as to England ... '*Thee, haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame; / All their attempts to bind thee down / Shall but increase thy generous flame, / And work their woe and thy renown.*' [Ferguson's emphasis]⁴⁷

⁴⁷P. Denman, "Literary Interactions : Samuel Ferguson's 19th Century", Unpublished Conference Paper, 26.07.1995, *Celts & Saxons*, John Hewitt International Summer School, 24-30 July 1995. Denman quotes from Ferguson reported in *The Nation*, 01.07.1848, 422-423. See also M. C. Ferguson, *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of His Day*, 1 (1896), 254.

When it is juxtaposed with the evidence of 'Mesgedra's' provenance and Ferguson's speech, Hewitt's adoption of the phrase "no rootless colonist" as a literary trope for his own self-confessedly British-orientated cultural identity is ironic.

As a nineteenth century Protestant writer who claimed he was discriminated against by Church and state, Ferguson is not easily absorbed into the romanticism of twentieth century revolutionary civic violence. Indeed, the evidence of shifting critical perspectives on Ferguson suggests that by the late 1960s his overt Protestantism and stout defence of the British political system had come to be viewed, at best, with embarrassment. The situation is very different in the case of John Hewitt who, in 1972 in "No rootless colonist" was able to aver:

In my experience, people of Planter stock often suffer from some crisis of identity, of not knowing where they belong. Among us you will find some who call themselves British, some Irish, some Ulstermen, usually with a degree of hesitation or mental fumbling.

Hewitt addressed these remarks to a viciously sectarian context and they signalled his willingness to declare *mea culpa* for the 'planter condition'. The unprecedented focus on this aspect of Hewitt in critico-cultural dialogue in Northern Ireland after 1968 provides the key to a rising profile that ironically paralleled Ferguson's diminishing status.

CHAPTER 3

‘ISN’T IT STRANGE THAT PROTESTANTS CAN’T DANCE?’¹

After the Troubles re-emerged in 1968, Samuel Ferguson’s reputation plummeted from originator of the Irish literary revival to Protestant propagandist and purloiner of Ireland’s cultural treasures for the Ascendancy. By contrast, Hewitt rose from relative obscurity to become Northern Ireland’s “first laureate” of the planter experience, and his profile as “father of modern Ulster poetry” and icon of cultural liberalism was vigorously promoted by critics such as Tom Clyde, Gerald Dawe, Edna Longley, Frank Ormsby and Damian Smyth.²

The first John Hewitt Summer School opened in 1988 with the theme, ‘An Ulster Poet and his Quest’. Written as an obituary for Hewitt, Eavan Boland’s article, “John Hewitt : an appreciation”, enlarges on the nature of that quest:

Hewitt became the voice and conscience of a fragmented culture ... aware of the difficulties of his position as a Northern poet ... he explored

¹ F. McGuinness, *The Bird Sanctuary*, (c1994), TMsS, 83. Tina muses inconsequentially, “Yes, and isn’t it strange that Protestants can’t dance? Mind you, they have beautiful skin. Mine is like a bush. I blame the Famine”.

² Frank Ormsby named Hewitt “first laureate” in Introduction, *Poets from the North of Ireland*, (1990); James Simmons dubbed Hewitt ‘daddy of them all’ in “Some notes on the origins of *The Honest Ulsterman*”, *Honest Ulsterman*, 95, (1993), 7. For a critique of this image of Hewitt see, R. Kirkland, “The daddy of us all? John Hewitt’s writing and regionalism in Northern Ireland”, *Causeway* 13 (Summer 1994), 19-23.

his awkward inheritance with a good deal of subtlety ... he refuses either to disclaim his inheritance, or ... be excluded from his Irishness on account of it ... his sense of cultural dispossession made him, at his best, profound ... he will be seen in the end as one of the most radical witnesses of the pain of history which Irish poetry has yet produced ... he is one of the most original elegists of Irish division ... nothing distracted him from his shrewd and honest exploration of the distance between nationality and identity ... He is a quiet, rigorous conscience in the midst of a great deal of self-deception.³

A survey of criticism on Hewitt reveals that Boland's eulogy is unexceptional. Introducing *The Poet's Place* (1991), a collection of papers given at the first three Hewitt Summer Schools, Gerald Dawe and John Wilson Foster explained that the School had been:

Inaugurated to keep green the memory of this important Ulsterman whose appeal crossed sectarian boundaries, and to celebrate his poetry in discussion and readings, The School quickly realised the wealth of cultural topics ... Hewitt had left as legacy, not only in his verse but also in his essays and reviews, as well as in the comrades and contemporaries of a working life better than half a century long.

Together with Ian Duhig's remark that Hewitt's "reputation as poet and social thinker was high [when he died] in 1987",⁴ Boland's and Dawe's and Foster's comments are evidence of a remarkable transformation in critical

³E. Boland, *Irish Times*, 30.06.1987, 8.

⁴I. Duhig, "Pictures carried with singing", *Irish Review*, 12 (Spring-Summer 1992), 165.

responses to Hewitt since 1969 when, writing to Michael Longley, he bitterly lamented indifference to his work.⁵

Hewitt was first published by *The Irishman* in 1928.⁶ The 708 pages of *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* published by Blackstaff in 1991 reflect the prodigious output of a long career. By 1968, Hewitt had been writing for forty years, although his work was printed mainly in small numbers by local presses - often at his expense - either in pamphlets or literary journals. Robert Greacen has observed that “Hewitt was underrated in his middle years”, and that while he had some standing within “the small Northern literary and art world ... the Ulster poet who was getting most of the attention at home and across the water was W. R. Rodgers”.⁷ By contrast to Rodgers’ runaway success with his first book, *Awake! and Other Poems* (1941), Hewitt’s *No Rebel Word* (1948) did not secure him wider notice. When it was remaindered less than two years later, Roberta Hewitt noted in her Journal that her husband was inconsolable:

J. threw me a letter and said ‘read that’. It was from Muller about *No Rebel Word*. It said bluntly - this book had not been asked for for a long time and they still had 507 copies if J. had no idea of how they could be disposed of they would be destroyed. It was shattering ... J. told me this letter came when I was at the cottage a fortnight ago ... but he couldn’t

⁵ J. Hewitt to M. Longley, ALS, 08.02.1969. Public Record Office Northern Ireland. [PRONI].

⁶ J. Hewitt quoted in S. McAughtry, “Trying to make sense of the North”, *Irish Times*, 25.07.1983, 10.

⁷ R. Greacen, “John Hewitt : a personal tribute”, *Ulster Tatler*, 08.11.1983, 74.

tell me ... [but] ... kept it to himself and did not let me share his misery ... my heart bled for him.⁸

Roberta records other disappointments in this period: "Jonny got his poems 'Expectancy', 'Mother and Son' and 'Benediction' back from the *Listener*. They won't print Jonny now and always return his poems by return of post".⁹ Roberta's comments are evidence that *No Rebel Word's* failure to make an impact was one of several setbacks for Hewitt in the late 1940s. However, writing to John Montague in 1964, Hewitt's claim that he took a *laissez-faire* approach to fame and getting his work published suggests that by then he was reconciled to these disappointments:

I have never expected to be a roaringly popular poet. This may be conceit, but I always remember that lifetime popularity is a dangerous condition. ... My attitude is complicated. I would enjoy reputation, but have a hang-back that will not let me do very much in seeking it. My first book was organised by my wife and Geoffrey Taylor. Without my wife's efforts there'd be no second on the slips.¹⁰

It might be argued that Hewitt misrepresented his feelings to Montague; his remarks are inconsistent with the evidence of Roberta's Journal which records his strenuous attempts to get published and his upset when

⁸ R. Hewitt, Journal, 14.08.1950. PRONI., and Granada Publishing to R. Hewitt, TLS, 11.06.1971. PRONI.

⁹ R. Hewitt, Journal, 14.11.1947. PRONI.

¹⁰ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster at Coleraine. [JHC].

unsuccessful. Further, Hewitt implies that he published *No Rebel Word* almost as an afterthought and that it got good reviews:

Now about *No Rebel Word*: the title, a quotation from a sonnet of mine, was deliberately ambiguous, meaning no word leaping or tugging out of the consigned order, and at the same time no word by a rebel?, asserting as it were that I was no rebel whatever folk might think. I corrected the page proofs in 1947 and it was published a year after. So by that time my interest had appreciably diminished. In addition, it contained nothing written after 1944, so that it was faraway from my active thought. The price 7/6 I thought too much then. It sold about 150 copies, got some good reviews.

Again, Hewitt's remarks are countered by the evidence of Roberta's Journal which documents his considerable emotional investment in the book's success and his acute distress when it was remaindered. Nevertheless, the tenor of Austin Clarke's review of *No Rebel Word* supports Hewitt's claim that it was well received:

This is [Hewitt's] first collection of poems and it has an unusual maturity ... his reputation should be assured. He has learned his craft the sturdy way ... and knows when to suggest rather than to state ... There is a danger in this quiet form of poetry which so often begins as a country walk, the danger of pedestrianism and Mr. Hewitt does not always escape it: but mostly he induces in us a mood of confidence and expectancy".¹¹

By contrast, there is evidence in Roberta's Journal that most reviews of *No Rebel Word* echoed the more negative aspects of Clarke's comments.

¹¹ A. Clarke, "Nature and Art", *Irish Times*, 08.02.1949, 8.

Roberta observes: "I read some of the reviews - people always said technically it was competent but that ... Johnny lacked awareness of present day affairs and was not affectionate".¹² Crucially, Hewitt was not published by any major publisher for the next twenty years, and when *Collected Poems* appeared in 1968, the critical response to it was also muted and it was remaindered less than three years later.¹³

Evidence that interest in Hewitt's work was minimal through *No Rebel Word* (1948) to *Collected Poems* (1968) confirms that he was indeed, to use Greacen's term, 'underrated'. Moreover, in 1968 Hewitt found critical indifference to *Collected Poems* especially painful. Writing privately to Michael Longley in 1969, he admitted that this had reawakened long-held resentment at scant appreciation of his work. Dissecting his relationship with Rodgers, Hewitt commented bitterly, "now quite honestly ... the explosive success of his first book - he had only been writing for three years - made me very jealous ... I kept my feelings to myself and to Roberta, and never mentioned them to him. It took a while to get over". Clearly frustrated, Hewitt continued, "apart from a pedestrian paragraph in a teachers' journal, nothing has come out this side of the water ... Had I been

¹²R. Hewitt, Journal, 03.02.1949. PRONI.

¹³MacGibbon and Kee's letter to Hewitt, TLS, 12.03.1969. PRONI, outlined the "review situation" as "rather bleak". *Collected Poems* was remaindered in June 1971 and Hewitt bought 130 copies at a "remainder price of 5p each". See Granada Publishing to R. Hewitt, TLS, 11.06.1971. PRONI. *Collected Poems* was not reprinted and publishing rights reverted to Hewitt. See J. Hewitt to A. Tannahill, TLS, 29.10.1980. JHC.

a homosexual, they'd have rallied round instantly as they did in Joe Ackerley's autobiography".¹⁴ Interviewed by Damian Smyth sixteen years later in 1985, Hewitt was asked if he thought his work had been neglected or underestimated. He replied, "well, I had that a bit. Particularly in the case of W. R. Rodgers, whom I was very close to. He got an awful lot of attention. I didn't resent that, but I thought it was a wee bit unfair".¹⁵ Evidence that Hewitt continued to refer back to the disparity between his and Rodgers' achievements in the 1940s, over a period extending from 1969 when he wrote to Michael Longley to 1985 when he was interviewed by Smyth, indicates that he sustained considerable rancour at his lack of status. Moreover, considered beside the evidence of Roberta's Journal and Hewitt's private letter to Longley, Hewitt's answer to Smyth's question was, like his remarks to Montague in 1964, coy.

The intimacy of Hewitt's letter to Longley hints at shared frustration on the brink of the 1970s. By contrast, Northern Ireland's literary life was being revitalised by new, challenging voices and a heady backdrop of idealistic fervour and civil unrest. Largely, these 'literary beginnings' reflected the influence of the 'Belfast Group' presided over by Philip Hobsbaum at Queen's University during the 1960s; galvanised by an

¹⁴ J. Hewitt to M. Longley, ALS, 08.02.1969. PRONI.

¹⁵ J. Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then...younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 15.

“accelerating ... political pulse” and a pervasive “sense of living through a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ moment”, these twin forces stimulated unprecedented interest in the poet’s place in Northern Ireland.¹⁶ Seamus Deane notes, “communal warfare often sponsors an art in which the temptation to become the tribune of the plebs is irresistible”.¹⁷ Derek Mahon, a “lapsed Protestant” who, like Michael Longley, painstakingly distanced himself from “Philip Hobsbaum’s fucking Belfast group”, published his first volume, *A Night Crossing*, in 1968.¹⁸ Mahon later recalled that his early work signalled his sense of “cultural deprivation” and the lack of ‘moral pulchritude’ in the North.¹⁹ Confessing a “perverse pride in being on the side / Of the fallen angels” and “refusing to get up” (‘The Spring vacation’ (1969)), Mahon summoned the souls of Heaney’s allegorical “picnickers” (‘The Plantation’ (1969)) on a symbolic cultural retreat into ‘A disused shed in County Wexford’.²⁰ Arguably, the moment was Heaney’s: viewed retrospectively, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) symbolised the march of the Catholic minority out of the dark hinterlands “Past the picnickers’ belt” and into a bloody fight for civil rights

¹⁶ M. Parker, *Seamus Heaney : The Making of a Poet*, (1993), 90.

¹⁷ In *Celtic Revivals*, (1985), 162, Deane contends that Mahon resists this temptation.

¹⁸ D. Mahon quoted in J. J. Murphy, L. McDiarmid and M. J. Durkan, “Q. and A. with Derek Mahon”, *Irish Literary Supplement*, 10, 2, (1991), 28.

¹⁹ D. Mahon, quoted in “An interview with Derek Mahon”, *Poetry Ireland*, 14, (Autumn 1985), 14, 11.

(‘The Plantation’).²¹ With perfect symmetry, Heaney and Mahon, one Catholic and one - albeit ‘lapsed’ - Protestant, the former wilfully declaring cultural confidence, the latter theatrically donning the sackcloth and ashes of cultural despair, were, Tom Adair observes, “the focus of critical interest in the Northern Irish revival”.²² Adair notes that by comparison Michael Longley was “slow to find a voice”; his first book *No Continuing City* was not published until 1969. Then, as now, Longley showed commendable restraint towards the contemporary, headlong rush to “diagnose / Experience” (‘A personal statement : *for Seamus Heaney*’ (1991)).²³ Notwithstanding Longley’s reticence, the wider context was heady with fresh emphases on the communicative force of poetry. Hewitt recalls, “when I came back it was to a flourishing area - Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, another generation. I find that never before in my lifetime has poetry been so flourishing in the North”.²⁴ As Hewitt’s remarks

²⁰ D. Mahon, *Poems 1962-1978*, (1986), 4, 79.

²¹ S. Heaney, *Selected Poems 1965-1975*, (1980), 49.

²² T. Adair, “Of flock and fold : a consideration of the poetry of Michael Longley”, *Linen Hall Review*, 4, 1, (1987), 16. Asked “what kind of Protestant” he is, Derek Mahon explains, “Lapsed. I was brought up in the Church of Ireland”. See J. J. Murphy, L. McDiarmid and M. J. Durkan, “Q. and A. with Derek Mahon”, *Irish Literary Supplement*, 10, 2, (1991), 28.

²³ M. Longley, *Poems, 1963-1983*, (1991), 27-28.

²⁴ J. Hewitt quoted in N. Kiely, “John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock”, *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6.

imply, unprecedented opportunities for writers beckoned and, anticipating retirement to Belfast, he, unlike Longley, relished the prospect.

Analysing this context heightens the contrast between Hewitt's neglected status before the 1970s and, for example, Heaney's and Mahon's seemingly effortless and apparently instantaneous success. However, the development of Hewitt's relationship with John Montague between 1964 and 1970 when they participated in *The Planter and the Gael*, proved to be of critical importance. Besides paralleling a hardening of attitudes towards Protestant cultures, it featured a chain of events that culminated in Hewitt achieving unprecedented fame.

The first was the publication of Montague's essay, "Regionalism into reconciliation" (1964), where he named Hewitt the "first (and probably the last) deliberately Ulster, Protestant poet".²⁵ Gratified to be noticed, Hewitt wrote immediately to Montague declaring that he doubted "if there's another mortal who has taken so much trouble to grasp after [my work's] tendency".²⁶ That Hewitt's profile was insubstantial in 1964 compared to the 'laureate' status he later enjoyed is underlined by the evidence of John Evans' comment in 1968 that he "had[s] been writing poetry since 1927,

²⁵ J. Montague, *Poetry Ireland*, 3, (Spring 1964), 118.

²⁶ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC. Curiously, Hewitt simultaneously informed a James Liddy that while "certainly grateful to Montague for giving my verses so much careful attention ... there are ... one or two points where [he] hasn't got things right". See J. Hewitt to J. Liddy, ALS, 02.04.1964, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

something of which Coventry was unaware until this week when his collected poems were published by MacGibbon and Kee".²⁷

The second event was the launch of *Collected Poems* in August 1968 which coincided with the first catalytic disturbances of the Troubles. Notably, in "Spiritual maverick" (1986/87) Montague claimed to have persuaded MacGibbon and Kee to publish this book.²⁸ Arguably, Montague sought to demonstrate, perhaps believed, that he had had a superior influence over Hewitt with the publisher in 1968; taking credit for advancing Hewitt's profile at the critical moment when 'nationalist' unrest erupted, Montague implies that he, a Catholic writer, had gone against the tide to extend a lone hand of friendship to a 'maverick' Protestant artist who had been persecuted, exiled and neglected by 'his own kind', the 'morally pulchritudinous' Northern majority. Intriguingly, however, a letter from MacGibbon and Kee to Hewitt in 1969 contradicts Montague's claim. Writing to Hewitt in April 1969, Timothy O'Keefe discussed his resolve to publish *Collected Poems* and added, "John Montague has given me a great deal, but, just for the record, he was not the 'begetter' in your case".²⁹ Despite the evidence of O'Keefe's letter, in 1971 Hewitt acknowledged Montague's recommending *Collected Poems* to MacGibbon and Kee by

²⁷ J. Evans, "Profile of John Hewitt", *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 29.08.1968, 6.

²⁸ J. Montague, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 18.

²⁹ T. O'Keefe to J. Hewitt, TLS, 24.04.1969. PRONI.

dedicating *An Ulster Reckoning* “to John Montague, a practical friend”.³⁰ It is not immediately clear why Hewitt credited Montague with a kindness he knew had not been rendered. On the other hand, the disparity between Montague’s idealised account of his sponsorship for *Collected Poems* in 1968 and Hewitt’s public recognition of it, and the evidence of O’Keefe’s letter reveals an element of satire in their relationship. Arguably, it suggests that they were acutely aware of the latent symbolism generated by their partnership, the potential of which was first immortalised in the title of Montague’s essay, “Regionalism into reconciliation” (1964), and which reached its acme in the third important happening in Hewitt’s rise to prominence, their coming together in *The Planter and the Gael* reading tour in 1970.³¹ As John Wilson Foster notes, by then both were “conscious of their representative status as, respectively, native and planter”.³² The evidence of Montague’s reference to *The Planter and the Gael* in 1986/87

³⁰ There is much anecdotal evidence crediting Montague with recommending *Collected Poems* to MacGibbon and Kee which had produced his first two collections *Poisoned Lands* (1961) and *A Chosen Light* (1967). Roy McFadden recalls that Hewitt frequently stated he dedicated *An Ulster Reckoning* to Montague for promoting *Collected Poems* with MacGibbon and Kee. McFadden interviewed by S. Ferris at his home in Belfast, July, 1996. As so often with Hewitt, there appears to be no documentary evidence to support McFadden’s remarks or contradict O’Keefe’s disclaimer.

³¹ *The Planter and the Gael* (1970) marked the highpoint of the Hewitt/Montague friendship which was strained by 1980. See T. Kearney, “Beyond the Planter and the Gael”, *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 729. See also Montague’s reference to Hewitt’s “bigoted bits” in “Spiritual maverick”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 17-18, and Hewitt’s re-evaluation of their relationship in his letter to a Miss Craig, TLS, 17.04.1976. PRONI.

³⁴ J. W. Foster, “The landscape of the Planter and Gael in the poetry of John Hewitt and John Montague”, *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 2, (November 1975), 17.

as “our half serious effort in community relations” further supports Foster’s observation.³³ Equally, in 1969, Hewitt’s remark when writing to E. N. Carrothers that, “I feel that I am a representative Ulsterman”, offers a telling insight into the direction of his thinking in that context.³⁴ However, unlike Montague, for whom *The Planter and the Gael* coincided with the release of a third collection, *Tides* (1970), in 1970 Hewitt was still in Coventry, had published little and was, Robert Johnstone later observed, “sidelined by Heaney, Longley and Mahon”.³⁵ Further, *Collected Poems*, like *No Rebel Word* in 1948, had not brought Hewitt the recognition he desired.³⁶ However, in 1971 Hewitt published *An Ulster Reckoning* privately; with his plans to retire to Belfast well advanced, he hoped that this collection, unlike the earlier two, might make a “social impact”.³⁷ Accordingly, beside the evidence of *An Ulster Reckoning*’s uncharacteristic polemic, a reappraisal of Hewitt’s superfluous tribute to Montague on the book’s flyleaf indicates that it may well have been a shrewd attempt to capitalise on the success of *The Planter and the Gael* (1970) and attract

³³ J. Montague, “Spiritual maverick”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 17-18.

³⁴ J. Hewitt to E. N. Carrothers, TLS, 18.10.1969. PRONI.

³⁵ R. Johnstone, “Listening for the landward bells”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 25.01.1992.

³⁶ Michael Longley glosses critical neglect of *Collected Poems* in the tour booklet, *The Planter and the Gael*, describing it as “one of the most distinguished collections of recent years”. This is an early example of his central role in promoting Hewitt.

³⁷ Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, “Beyond the Planter and the Gael”, *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 729. John Hewitt bought Il Stockman’s Lane, Belfast, in April, 1969.

maximum publicity for his book.³⁸ Disappointingly, *An Ulster Reckoning* became, in Hewitt's phrase, his "unheeded collection".³⁹

The most important event in transforming Hewitt into 'daddy of them all' was the reading tour, *The Planter and the Gael*. Introducing the accompanying booklet - also titled *The Planter and the Gael* - Michael Longley wrote:

In the selection of his poems each poet explores his experience of Ulster, the background in which he grew up and the tradition which has shaped his work. John Montague defines the culture of the Gael, John Hewitt that of the Planter. The two bodies of work complement each other and provide illuminating insight into the cultural complexities of the Province.

Following on this, when discussing the Council's literary initiatives in *Causeway : The Arts in Ulster* (1971), Longley commented that "in all civilised countries" the "arts" provide a "path of stepping stones ... especially in a troubled community like our own".⁴⁰ Longley's *Clapper*

³⁸ In Introduction, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991), F. Ormsby notes that *An Ulster Reckoning* had "an undeniable urgency" that "gave the impression of instant, unmediated response and of recourse to rhetoric and imagery".

³⁹ J. Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael", *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 729.

⁴⁰ M. Longley, Introduction, *Causeway : The Arts in Ulster*, (1971), 9. In the foreword to *Outlook*, a similar project to *The Planter and the Gael*, Longley wrote, "The Arts Council believes that the regular interaction between artist and community will provide points of growth, new sources of creative energy, opportunities for communal self-expression [and] self-definition". See M. Longley, *Tuppenny Stung*, (1994), 55. The Council's commitment to 'educative' ventures is reflected in the finance directed to them. In October 1970, for example, Longley's memorandum of schemes and proposals

Bridge (from 'Points of the compass for John Hewitt') (1972-75)

encapsulates the link between his and Hewitt's similar views on the function of art.

One way to proceed:
 Taking the water step
 By step, stepping stones
 With a roof over them,
 a bed of standing stones,
 Watery windows sunk
 Into a dry-stone wall,
 Porches for the water,
 Some twists completing it
 and these imperfections
 Set, like the weather,
 On the eve of mending.⁴¹

As is the case with *Clapper Bridge* (1972-75), which reflects Longley's central focus on art as a pathway to 'civilisation', Hewitt's 'For stonecutters' (1980) posits an identical point of convergence:

Select the stone. Incise the words
 exactly marking time of year.
 Cut deep or shallow as required.
 Let light or shadow emphasise.

Define with kerb the viewer's stance.
 Avoid abstractions large or small.
 All value judgements flake or split.
 The lettered stone's the metaphor.⁴²

allocated £1,250 to *The Planter and the Gael*, which is a significant percentage of a £7,000 overall budget. See Minutes, ACNI, TDS, 02.10.1970.

⁴¹ M. Longley, *Poems, 1963-1983*, (1991), 122-123.

⁴² J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 312.

Writing in 1968, in 'For a moment of darkness over the nations' Hewitt's accent indicates that he did not advocate that the artist should wait upon happy chance:

The black cloud
is a happy portent
for dwellers in the drylands
waiting for the monsoon.

You there,
take up your dusty prayer-wheel.
As for me, I shall stand up
and begin the Rain Dance.⁴³

Compared to the meticulous prosody of much of Hewitt's verse, 'For a moment of darkness over the nations' conveys untypical elation. This reflects his optimism for *Collected Poems* (1968) and his keenness to embark on significant tasks in retirement. Indeed, the matching stresses in Hewitt's 'For a moment of darkness over the nations' (1968), and Longley's *Clapper Bridge* (1972-75) and comments in *The Planter and the Gael* (1970) and *Causeway* (1971), highlight how their shared vision of the artist as legislator of society found an unexpected opportunity for expression in the specific politico-cultural backdrop to *The Planter and the Gael*.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 221.

Observing Northern Ireland's cultural scene in 1970, one arch observer deduced that *The Planter and the Gael* sought to affirm that the "hope of the future" lay in "Resolution through the Arts Council".⁴⁴ In 1971, Longley reconsidered Montague's reference to Hewitt in 1964 as, "the first (and probably the last) deliberately Ulster, Protestant poet", and remarked: "in normal times I would insist that [Hewitt] is much more than this: in the present political situation, however, Montague's description reasonably suggests the importance of John Hewitt's poetry".⁴⁵ The strength of Longley's continuing veneration for Hewitt is highlighted by the evidence of his remarks in "The Longley tapes" published fourteen years later in 1985. Condemning his homeland as a "godforsaken place" Longley declared, "when Hewitt came back to live here, that was a very important moment for the community, very important to me : an enormous endorsement ... well, he endorsed the place with his life".⁴⁶ As Andrew Waterman has observed of critico-cultural developments in the 1970s, "with Michael Longley ... we are at the centre of the Ulster literary scene, for which in his job with the province's Arts Council [he] is an assiduous propagandist".⁴⁷ It was in his capacity as Assistant Director of the Arts

⁴⁴ Felix, "The Planter and the Gael", *Fortnight*, 6, (December 1970), 10.

⁴⁵ M. Longley, "Poetry", *Causeway : The Arts in Ulster*, (1971), 102.

⁴⁶ M. Longley, *Honest Ulsterman*, 78, (Summer 1985), 22.

⁴⁷ A. Waterman, "Ulsterectomy", *Hibernia*, 43, 17, (April 1979), 16.

Council that Longley nominated Hewitt to its Literature Committee in 1971. Disregarding Hewitt's three "unheeded" books, *No Rebel Word* (1948), *Collected Poems* (1968) and *An Ulster Reckoning* (1971), the first two of which had been remaindered and the third published privately, Longley presented him to the Committee as a "distinguished Ulster Poet".⁴⁸ The evidence of the Literature Committee Minutes (1965-1979) [Minutes] indicates that Hewitt's membership of the Committee in the early 1970s was an important factor in sustaining the momentum of his transformation from neglected émigré to exemplary Protestant icon;⁴⁹ a process that had begun when Montague named him the "first (and probably the last) deliberately Ulster, Protestant poet" in 1964, and was accelerated by their partnership in *The Planter and the Gael* in 1970. Notably, in 1972, just three years after he wrote to Longley complaining of neglect, two years after appearing on *The Planter and the Gael*, and one year after joining the Literature Committee, an *Irish Times* editorial, "Not outcast on the world", acclaimed Hewitt as laureate of the "Northern majority".⁵⁰ This amazing metamorphosis highlights the rapidity of Hewitt's progress from oblivion to centre-stage

⁴⁸ Minutes, ACNI, TDS, 25.11.1971. PRONI.

⁴⁹ Minutes. ACNI. TDS, 28.10.1965-08.10.1979. PRONI.

⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, 25.03.1972. The headline is taken from the closing line of 'The colony'.

which is even more remarkable when juxtaposed with a context where Protestant cultures were being widely defamed.

Membership of the Literature Committee of the Arts Council provided Hewitt with the opportunity to consolidate his rising profile after he went home to take his place as Northern Ireland's most senior resident poet. Primarily, it helped him to establish a fruitful relationship with Blackstaff, which was then an embryonic press heavily dependent on Arts Council funds. In 1971, for example, the same year that Hewitt joined the Literature Committee, Blackstaff was granted a "Major Award" by the Council. Notably, such awards were ratified by the Literature Committee and, as Literature Officer, Michael Longley liaised with Blackstaff on awards for publishing subventions and capital costs. In March 1972, the Literature Committee expressed concern that Blackstaff was not fulfilling the Council's aim to "encourage promise rather than give pats on the back to established writers". In October 1972, Longley supported a subsidy for Blackstaff's list of books "of literary interest"; this was reluctantly agreed but the committee requested future access to "audited accounts of the press". Bearing in mind the Committee's unease, and the fact that Longley had introduced Hewitt to it as a "distinguished Ulster Poet", it might be considered surprising that, as the evidence of Minutes shows, after his return to Belfast in October 1972, Hewitt received a remarkable level of support from the Council and from Blackstaff press while serving on sub-

committees responsible for allocating budgets. In October 1973, Hewitt joined a sub-committee to “consider literature applications”; this “examined [Blackstaff’s] projected 1973-1974 ... titles which would be assisted by the Arts Council subvention”. In January 1974, Hewitt was again on the sub-committee “advis[ing] the Awards Committee”, and in May 1974 he “represent[ed] the council’s interests” regarding subsidies to Blackstaff. In October and November 1974 respectively, Blackstaff published Hewitt’s *Out of My Time* and *Rhyming Weavers and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down*. Minutes record that this raised significant concern, and that on January 25 Hewitt formally denied Blackstaff had used Arts Council subventions to produce *Out of My Time*. Hewitt does not mention the second book. Hewitt was Chair of the Literature Committee and one of two representatives on its Awards sub-committee for a considerable period. During it, Blackstaff was granted an interest free loan in April 1976. The following May, the Committee agreed that, as its “main local outlet”, Blackstaff’s portion of the Council’s budget would be sanctioned by the Finance and General Purposes committee. This decision was significant because it meant that Blackstaff no longer had to seek agreement for specific titles. In October 1976, the Council produced Hewitt’s *Colin Middleton*, and in November Blackstaff published *Time Enough*. Coincidentally, in April 1976 Hewitt Chaired the Committee that allocated “two sums from the 1976 and 1977 budget for writers in residence at

Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster at Coleraine". He was again in the Chair in January 1977 when the Committee announced that a joint committee from the "Arts Council and [Queen's] University had elected him first writer in residence at QUB". Significantly, Michael Longley was also on that selection panel while Edna Longley was already an influential figure in the University's English Department.⁵¹ Hewitt remained on the Literature Committee and sub-committee overseeing awards and subventions to Blackstaff. Subsequently, the Council funded a film of Hewitt's life and work, *I Found Myself Alone* (1978), his study of the artist, *John Luke 1906-1975* (1978), and subsidised a recording of his poetry, *Substance and Shadow* (1980). Blackstaff also received subventions for *New and Revised Poems* (1978), a new edition of *Rhyming Weavers* (1978) and *107 Sonnets* (1979). Together, the evidence of Michael Longley's sponsorship of Hewitt's participation in *The Planter and the Gael* (1970) and to membership of the Literature Committee, and Minutes, which record how Hewitt's connection with this body furthered his alliance with Blackstaff, highlights the critical significance of the three-way link

⁵¹ Minutes. ACNI. TDS, 15.01.1977 and 19.01.1977. PRONI. Complementing A. Waterman's analysis of an influential 'inner circle' in the 'literary scene' in the 1970s, in "Ulsterectomy", *Hibernia*, 43, 17, (April 1979), 16-17, Minutes record that in April 1977 Hewitt and Michael Longley were on the selection panel when, as Chair of the Literature Committee, Hewitt announced Derek Mahon's election as first writer in residence at Coleraine. Minutes. ACNI. TDS, 19.04.1977. PRONI.

between Longley, the Arts Council and Blackstaff to Hewitt's rise to, in Boland's phrase, the "voice and conscience of a fragmented culture".

In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) Matthew Arnold contended that "sovereign educators" or "lovers of culture" are, "for the sake of the future ... unswervingly and with a good conscience the opposors of anarchy". 'Culture' is, "the great help out of our present difficulties" because it provides the means to "detach ourselves from our stock notions and habits", increase a community's "desire for sweetness and light" and encourage a "more free play of consciousness".⁵² Paradoxically, Arnold also asserted controversial, innate oppositions between Celt and Saxon. The "Celt" is "undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent by nature". The "Saxon" is "disciplinable and steadily obedient ... retaining an inalienable part of freedom and self-dependence".⁵³ The crude oppositions exploited by Longley in *The Planter and the Gael*, and the similar events promoted by him in the 1970s: *Out of the Blue* with James Simmons and Paul Muldoon, and *In their Element* with Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney, were peculiarly indebted to Arnold's philosophy.⁵⁴ Just as Arnold distinguished between putative, diverse racial characteristics of the "Celt and Saxon", Longley's pairings comprised one Catholic writer and one

⁵² M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (1893), 204, 211.

⁵³ J. Bryson, ed., *Matthew Arnold : Poetry and Prose*, (1954), 472.

⁵⁴ M. Longley, *Tuppenny Stung*, (1994), 54.

Protestant writer. In each publicly funded event, writers took to the stage and choreographed 'difference', intending, perhaps, to legislate for an "enlightened way of life" and lead the proletariat from "anarchy". Montague comments, "our use of the labels planter and Gael cannot be seen outside of our intended exercise in community relations ... that exercise briefly assumed the two terms as limiting masks which it was then hoped would prompt others to examine their identity more deeply".⁵⁵

Problematically, as W. H. Auden's 'Counsel for the Defence' declared in "The public v. the late Mr. William Butler Yeats": "art is a product of history, not a cause ... it does not re-enter history as an effective agent".⁵⁶ Analysed from a present perspective, Arnold's vision of 'culture' is exclusive; essentially, it elevates the 'academy' - a modern synonym for Arnold's "sovereign educators" - to arbiter of 'right reason'. There is no evidence that the cultural alignments of *The Planter and the Gael*, *Out of the Blue* and *In their Element* were accidental. Accordingly, it might be deduced that, like Hewitt's mandatory stress on partnership between 'planners' and 'artists' in the 1940s, Longley's Arts Council sponsored initiatives in the 1970s fatally deferred to the dominant, ultimately reactionary critico-cultural theories of the nineteenth century. At best, they

⁵⁵ J. Montague quoted in T. Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael", *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 723.

⁵⁶ W. H. Auden, "The public v. the late Mr. William Butler Yeats", E. Mendelson, ed., *The English Auden : Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, (1986), 393.

were based on the subjective notion that the paradigmatic figure of the artist could inspire acceptance of 'difference' and dispel destructive prejudices.

The Cultural Traditions Group was formed in 1988. The Group took its ideological base from the thinking behind events like *The Planter and the Gael* and Longley was involved from its inception. He observed that it looked to:

Encourage in Northern Ireland the acceptance and understanding of cultural diversity; to replace political belligerence with cultural pride ... we expect no quick returns. This is a waiting game. To plan for it in a disrupted social context like our own should not be beyond us.⁵⁷

It might be argued that, after nearly thirty years of violence Longley's continuing belief in art as a mediating force was a triumph of hope over reality.⁵⁸ As Richard English observes:

Cultural diversity in Northern Ireland is, in fact, anything but an asset....
...The celebration of diversity and also the liberal belief in the possibilities of educated tolerance, are of questionable relevance to Northern Ireland ... because the situation - politically, culturally,

⁵⁷ M. Longley, *Tuppenny Stung*, (1994), 70.

⁵⁸ E. Longley's letter to the *Guardian Weekend*, July 23, 1994, 17, suggests she agrees with Michael Longley's focus on art as a mediating force. Longley challenges Ronan Bennett's, "rehashed ... dated sectarian, partisan analysis" of Northern Irish culture, "Bennett gives no credit to the writers, visual artists, musicians, intellectuals, publishers and promoters of Community or traditional arts who have fought long battles to change the ethos here. This is the 'peace process' that will count in the end".

demographically - is so appalling. Indeed, to ignore the true dimensions of the problem involves the danger of seriously worsening it.⁵⁹

English's analysis of liberal initiatives, which argues that they are impotent before the central political impasse, is supplemented by the evidence of Steve Bruce's contemporaneous remark:

There is a unique political element to the promotion of arts and heritage in Northern Ireland: the liberal hope that the celebration and cultivation of cultural traditions might offer a way out of the cul-de-sac of the present zero sum conflict in which anything perceived to advantage one side is automatically seen to disadvantage the other.⁶⁰

Considered together, English's and Bruce's comments highlight the absence of a truly radical poetic voice in Northern Ireland; one able to, or indeed desirous of transcending the limits imposed by sectarian division. On 'one side' of the divide in the 1970s, for example, Roy McFadden admitted to being "trapped by tied / Tiers of faces blinding stoned deaf road: / Inactive, voiceless, I chewed famine crumbs" ('Those glorious Twelfths' (1971)).⁶¹ From the 'other side', Heaney loudly asserted victim status. Crudely exploiting sectarian polarities, Heaney's contradistinctive portraits of Protestants in 'Dockers' (1966) and 'The other side' (1972), and Catholics in

⁵⁹ R. English, "Suggesting doubts to the influential : some reflections on cultural traditions", *Irish Review*, 15, (1994), 101, 102.

⁶⁰ S. Bruce, "Cultural traditions : a double-edged sword?", *Causeway*, 1, 3 (Autumn 1994), 22.

⁶¹ R. McFadden, *Collected Poems 1943-1995*, (1996), 188.

'Servant boy' (1972) and 'The last mummer' (1972), are evidence that his tongue immediately "went whoring / ... / among the civil tongues" ('The last mummer').⁶² In 1972, Heaney rejected the view that "poetry makes nothing happen" and, with no obvious irony, explained that it could, "eventually make new feelings, or feelings about feelings, happen, and anybody can see that in this country for a long time to come a refinement of feelings will be more urgent than a re-framing of policies or of constitutions".⁶³ Heaney's remark in 1986 that, "art is the dancing place where the tensions are resolved" is evidence that he sustained this viewpoint.⁶⁴ In the same context, Derek Mahon's elegiac critique of his art as it had intersected with the Troubles was equally vacuous: "the function of the arts is not to change maps but to change the expressions on the faces

⁶² S. Heaney, *Selected Poems : 1965-1975*, (1980), 59, 60, 71, and *Death of a Naturalist*, (1991), 28.

⁶³ S. Heaney, "Editor's Note", *Soundings*, 72, (1972), 6. Paradoxically, in 1977 Heaney observed, "I believe that the poet's force ... is to maintain the efficacy of his own 'mythos' his own cultural and political colourings, rather than to serve any particular momentary strategy". See Heaney quoted in S. Deane, "Unhappy and at home." *Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (Northern Issue) 1 1 (1977), 66-72. Intriguingly, in *Preoccupations* (1980), Heaney writes, "from that moment [1968] the problem of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament". (57) In "Escaped from the massacre? *North* by Seamus Heaney", *Honest Ulsterman*, 50, (Winter 1975), 183, C. Carson interprets *North* as evidence that, "Heaney seems to have moved ... from being a writer with a gift of precision to become the laureate of violence, a myth-maker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation', in the last resort, a mystifier".

⁶⁴ S. Heaney quoted in D. Lehman and D. Foote, "The Ulster renaissance", *Newsweek*, May 12, (1986), 54.

of men and women”.⁶⁵ Leaving aside their ‘different’ philosophical loci, Heaney’s and Mahon’s comments articulate a similar focus on ‘culture’ as arbiter of society which is as conservative as Longley’s Arts Council initiatives. Crucially, it was Hewitt’s adherence to this ideological vision, combined with his decision to return to Northern Ireland at a critical moment in its history and his subsequent willingness to appear as a Protestant icon of cross-community harmony in projects like *The Planter and Gael*, that secured him celebrity status with ‘local’ intelligentsia.

Felicia Pratto has observed that, “stating we have the right to our tastes, albeit wonderful, it is not sufficient for understanding how prejudice works because it doesn’t address how discrimination works”.⁶⁶ Set against a context of institutionalised sectarianism, the vanguard efforts of Northern Ireland’s “literary Athenian band” were uninspired.⁶⁷ As English and Bruce contend, they had the potential to reinforce pre-existing sectarian attitudes. In “Art and the c-word”, Tyrone Goodyear discussed the Arts Council’s role in cultural politics:

‘Excellence’, when the pious wrapping is removed, means ‘judgement’. In the hands of a genuinely well-meaning Arts Council, it also means ‘power’, exercised by some genuinely well-meaning quangocrat.

⁶⁵ D. Mahon quoted in *ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁶ F. Pratto, “Prejudice against discrimination”, *Psychological Inquiry*, 3, 2, (1992), 185.

⁶⁷ W. H. Auden, “The Public v. the Late Mr. William Butler Yeats”, E. Mendelson, ed., *The English Auden : Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, (1986), 390.

‘Community’, on the other hand, means ‘ownership’ of the means of entertainment and expression, or - to swipe the jargon of the voluntary sector - ‘empowerment’. There is no need for accountability to one’s community either. You just tack on the c-word and are then and forever immune from criticism from anybody, because you are moving things forward, and no one ever asks to where.

This is the ground on which arts and politics roll up their sleeves and have a good scrap. ‘Excellence’ and ‘community’ are codewords for social engineering, two words that create silver hairs on the great and the good faster than a crack pipe at evensong.⁶⁸

Considered beside the evidence of English’s and Bruce’s analyses of Northern Ireland’s ‘cultural scene’, Goodyear’s remarks usefully deconstruct the limited potential of philanthropic cross-cultural initiatives. They are especially relevant when considering David Sharrock’s comment that, since the Troubles began “depictions of the Protestant Unionist family in the arts have fared badly ... the Northern Irish Catholics had a better story to tell, or so it seemed from the outside”.⁶⁹ Sharrock’s assertion of critical unease with Protestant cultures and their literary legacies is supported by the evidence of Edna Longley’s comment that, “as regards ‘Literature in Belfast’, Belfast’s image, through most of its history, has combined Philistia with its other possible aspects as ‘Bigots-borough’ ... or Ckestown-across-the water”.⁷⁰ In referring to Belfast as, “‘Bigots-

⁶⁸ T. Goodyear, *Fortnight*, 339, (May 1995), 27.

⁶⁹ D. Sharrock, “Nobody knows the Troubles we’ve seen”, *Guardian*, 23.04.1997. G2, 11.

⁷⁰ E. Longley, *The Living Stream* (1994), 86.

borough' ... or Ckestown-across-the-water", Longley highlights twin negatives routinely ascribed to Protestants.

First, it is commonly assumed, and the idea rarely challenged, that the artistic sensibility of the Protestant psyche is stunted by obscurantist religious orthodoxies. Ronan Bennett, for example, disparages art from the "Protestant North" as an "art that celebrates the world that spawned it ... often it is an angry reaction to the prevalence of bigotry, claustrophobia and paranoia".⁷¹ Denouncing Belfast's dourly literal religious traditions, Adair writes of a city, "whose statues of Protestant divines stood vigilant and cold, stanchions of Presbyterian resolve, implacably disapproving of 'literature' which was not inscribed upon gable walls".⁷² Adair's remark is casually derisive, does not expand his reference to "Presbyterian resolve" or justify his claim that this amorphous concept is antithetical to 'literature'.⁷³ Similarly, when Michael Longley defines Louis MacNeice's melancholia as a legacy of "Ulster's darker attributes ... narrow religion and life-denying puritanism", like Adair he fails to refine his argument by explaining what he

⁷¹ R. Bennett, "One kingdom, four nations : an Irish answer", *Guardian Weekend*, 16.07.1994, 6-10, 55.

⁷² T. Adair, "Of flock and fold : a consideration of the poetry of Michael Longley", *Linen Hall Review*, 4, 1, (1987), 16.

⁷³ For a discussion of the Presbyterian contribution to Irish culture, see R. F. G. Holmes, "Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Nationalism", *Studies in Church History*, 18, (1982), Holmes, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*, (1985), and Holmes, *Irish Presbyterianism*, (1992).

means by “narrow religion” and “life-denying puritanism”.⁷⁴ Arguably, therefore, Adair and Longley assume reader collusion with agreed terms of reference. Following on this, in *Ulster's Protestant Working Class* (1994), Michael Hall contends that, since De Valera declared Ireland a “Christian and a Catholic nation ... the Protestants of Ireland ceased to figure in the ‘Irish’ consciousness, and their contribution to this island’s heritage was conveniently ignored”, while the present conflict “has tended to reduce their religion to a narrow stereotype, shorn of its rich diversity”. (9-10)

Complementing the evidence of Adair’s, Longley’s and Hall’s remarks, in his study of the “imaginative sense of Northern Ireland” in a discrete group of poets, George Watson examined what he interpreted as a casual vilification and dehumanising of Protestant cultures. Watson deduced that, “if the evidence of poems of [Tom] Paulin and [Derek] Mahon is accepted ... it would have to be said that the Protestant Northern Irish imagination feels deprived of a history”. Watson explained:

The Protestant poet, lacking access to the dynamism of nationalist history, or entree to a racial landscape ... sees his own culture as oppressively unredeemable and is forced back on a loveless repetition - admittedly powerfully expressed - of clichés about the sterilities and narrowness of the Calvinist statelet ... Tom Paulin’s ‘Desertmartin’ enacts an inferiority complex which has both historical and aesthetic aspects. These harsh asperities on the soured, bitter culture of twigs, bird-shit and Bibles of the North is - though it has its truth - a partial

⁷⁴ M. Longley, “The Neolithic night : a note on the Irishness of Louis MacNeice”, D. Dunn, ed., *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, (1975), 102.

truth ... this vision of the North is a mythological construction generated in complex and subtle ways by the nationalist mythology.⁷⁵

The second stereotypical image commonly associated with Northern Ireland is encapsulated in Edna Longley's reference to Belfast as 'Cokestown-across-the water'. Longley's comment reflects a prevalent view of the North as being marred by a gross industrialism. In 1945, for example, Hewitt lamented the "very inarticulateness of the Protestant block" and complained that, "our absurdly vaunted material values - of the largest shipyard, the largest ropeworks ... did really make the artist's position extremely difficult".⁷⁶ From a younger generation, Mahon decried his homeland as an imaginative hinterland because, "industrialism doesn't produce fruits ... the fruits of industrialism are ruination and waste, ugliness".⁷⁷ Arguably, Hewitt's and Mahon's visions are not representative of the wider Protestant community. As C. Cavanagh has observed, "its mostly non-Protestants who think Protestants are negative. Protestants don't wake up each morning and think they have a negative image. The more people say they have, the more people will expect it ... One of the

⁷⁵ G. Watson, "The narrow ground : Northern poets and the Northern Ireland crisis", M. Sekine, ed., *Irish Writers and Society at Large*, (1985), 217, 219.

⁷⁶ J. Hewitt, "The bitter gourd", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 114.

⁷⁷ D. Mahon quoted in "An interview with Derek Mahon", *Poetry Ireland*, 14, (Autumn 1985), 13.

keys to success is not accepting labels".⁷⁸ Interviewed in 1996, Robert McLiam Wilson, a Catholic writer from West Belfast, discussed his resolve to interrogate crude 'labels' routinely attached to the Northern Irish. Wilson explained: "in Irish literature, Protestants are deeply unsexy people ... like white South Africans with no sense of rhythm".⁷⁹ In *Eureka Street* (1996) Wilson uses his central character, 'Chuckie Lurgan', to satirise negative Protestant stereotypes, actually bringing in a parody of Seamus Heaney. Asked how he knows 'Chuckie Lurgan' is a "Prod", a Catholic youth replies, "I knew he was a Prod ... He didn't have any rhythm". (168) Using 'Jake's' narrative voice, Wilson develops his theme:

The great man, Ghinthoss, got up and read. He read about hedges, the lanes and the bogs. He covered rural topography in detail. It felt like a geography field trip. In a startling departure, he read a poem about a vicious Protestant murder of a nice Catholic. There were not spades in this poem, and only one hedge, but by this time the crowd were whipped into such a sectarian passion they would have lauded him if he'd picked his nose with any amount of rhythm or even in a particularly Irish manner.

He milked it all. Then he took some questions. ... they were [not] entirely facile but their content was mostly eugenic. These people gathered close together, snug in their verse, their culture, they had one question. Why can't Protestants do this? Why aren't they spiritual like us?

Ghinthoss was grandly forgiving. He seemed to think it was not all the Protestants' fault. Given a million or so years of Catholic supremacy, Protestant brows might lift, they might start with a few uneasy grunts, invent the wheel and wear bearskins. If we were kind, the poor dumb

⁷⁸ C. Cavanagh quoted in A. Duffield, "Waterside breaks the silence", *Irish Times*, 15.09.1994.

⁷⁹ R. McLiam Wilson quoted in C. Crewe, "Biting the bullet", *Times Magazine*, 07.09.1996, 18-20.

brutes might be able to manage a few domestic poetic tasks in a century or so.⁸⁰

Wilson developed this antipathetic leitmotif of the Protestant psyche from Maurice Leitch's novel, *Gilchrist* (1994), which he admires as a classic example of Leitch's unique ability to present the "definitive Protestant portrait. A Prod with rhythm, a perverse and loathsome rhythm, but big passion, big grandeur all the same".⁸¹ Reviewing *Gilchrist* in 1994, Wilson observed that Leitch, "belongs to no tradition, he hasn't much Irish in him", and, rather paradoxically perhaps, contended that as a Protestant he "has not been given the place he deserves amongst the writers of this island".

Wilson continued:

The Protestant vision, the Protestant version, isn't popular. It's got no rhythm. It's too complicated. The Catholic vision is familiar, *more Irish* somehow ... I've done well out of it ... the more battered and croppy boy I behave, the better I do ... I [who am a] rhythmic, west Belfast beneficiary. [Wilson's emphasis] (45)

⁸⁰ R. McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street*, (1996), 176. Heaney's 'Ireland' is increasingly challenged. Paul Muldoon comments, "I don't want this to be misconstrued, but ... [Heaney] ... does write within a certain mode. He's brilliant at it and it's been pretty much equal to the world as we've found it over the last while, but ... things are moving on ... I must think that there's something about the way I write that is more equal to how the world is". See Muldoon quoted in S. Magee, "It's always the right word : an interview with Paul Muldoon", *Honest Ulsterman*, 102, (Autumn 1996), 111, 112.

⁸¹ R. McLiam Wilson, "Rhythm method", *Fortnight*, 331, (September 1994), 46. For a discussion on "Catholic and Protestant modes of literary vision", see N. Vance, "Catholic and Protestant literary visions of 'Ulster': now you see it, now you don't.". TMs. 31.07.1996. Unpublished Conference Paper, John Hewitt International Summer School [JHISS], 29 July to 3 August, 1996.

Wilson's perception that the more he conforms to the Catholic stereotype the more successful he becomes is consistent with Sharrock's remark that the "Protestant Unionist family" has suffered from systematic neglect by the intelligentsia of the arts. Both insights are supplemented by the evidence of Pratto's analysis of psychological research into stereotyping and the nature of prejudice. Pratto observes:

People feel obliged to make up reasons for their prejudices (tastes), so that the prejudices (and then the reasons) can be passed on to other people....

...The greater part of the human condition, such as what and who we know, and whether we are hungry or sick, of what and when we will die, is not due to stereotyping alone. The fact that we categorize one another, habitually, as good or bad, does not account for these most basic human conditions.

Discrimination does....

...It is clear that certain groups in each society ... decide what beliefs, prejudices, and stereotypes are legitimate. ... When these groups are successful in convincing everyone else of the legitimacy of their beliefs, these beliefs take on the appearance of self-evident truth. That such beliefs come from historical and cultural learning does not make them any less apparent to their holders.⁸²

Pratto's summary of the interrelation between prejudice and stereotyping is apposite when evaluating Hewitt's rise to prominence after 1968, and the concomitant growth of negative views of Protestant cultures. Overwhelmingly, these defy the homogenising impulse, therefore remain outside the 'national' or 'group' dynamic and, crucially, the paternalistic

⁸²F. Pratto, "Prejudice against discrimination", *Psychological Inquiry*, 3, 2, (1992), 184-186.

ministrations of influential institutions like the Arts Council and the academy. Consequently, as Tom Nairn remarks, “hidden under its bowler hat, the physiognomy of this particular band of tongue-tied sons of bastards’ ghosts has remained curiously unknown”.⁸³ It is, therefore, unsurprising that, when confronted with a multiplicity of individually empowered identities interacting in broad coalition through inherited language cultures which, Myrtle Hill notes, give “old Reformation polarities new resonance”, ideologues retreat as from aberrant phenomena.⁸⁴

There is evidence to suggest that such timidity has been a central factor in stifling imaginative dialogue between ‘town’ and ‘gown’ in Northern Ireland, and in maintaining poor understanding of its Protestants. Coincident with Northern Ireland’s inception, Alexander Irvine’s memoir, *The Souls of Poor Folk* (1921), tellingly observed:

I do not believe that any community in the three kingdoms was ever so completely left to its own resources. ‘Our betters’ felt no responsibility toward us. If they had only known that they had the power to lift our somewhat sordid lives to a higher plane, they might have given us a little more of themselves. We had capacity for greater things. We could have been stimulated to greater intellectual effort, and it would have taken so little time or effort to do it.⁸⁵

⁸³ T. Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, (1977), 234.

⁸⁴ M. Hill, “Radicals, rioters and revivalists : religion in Belfast 1790-1900”, Unpublished Conference Paper, 27.07.1994, JHISS 25-30 July, 1994. See also, D. Hempton and M. Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, (1992). For a comprehensive analysis of Protestant cultures, see G. Beattie, *We are the People* (1993 (1992)) and, for a flavour of their variety, essays by A. Aughey, F. Holmes, M. Longley, and B. Mitchell in A. Thomson, ed., *Faith in Ulster*, (1996).

⁸⁵ A. Irvine, *The Souls of Poor Folk*, (1921), 23.

In the 1930s through to the 1950s, Thomas Carnduff articulated a similar theme:

Writing as a worker, Queen's University, or anything emanating from that institution, means very little to me. So far as I can remember, the University and the worker have little in common. It is an educational institution reserved to certain classes of the community ... I am open to correction. I am a looker-on from the outside. The University may be doing work I know nothing about. You don't bother to explain to the working-classes what benefit they derive from your institution, if any.⁸⁶

Carnduff's remarks run counter to Hewitt's claim in "Regionalism the last chance" (1947) that, "Queen's University has done a great deal, mostly through the extra-mural activities of its more responsible personnel" to "awaken[ed] popular consciousness". By contrast to 'worker-poet' Carnduff, Hewitt readily admitted that in the 1930s and 1940s and beyond his contemporaries were exclusively "from a section of society which had access to university education".⁸⁷ Significantly, in 1953, Oliver Edwards and Daphne Fullwood noted that, "our University ... has ... not always had the local scene, and the forms of English spoken here, as much in mind as it

⁸⁶T. Carnduff, "Letter to the Editor", *The New Northman*, 9, 1, (Spring 1941), 11. Ironically, in "The forgotten tradition", *Hibernia*, 11.10.1974, Hewitt lamented critical neglect of English worker poets.

⁸⁷J. Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael", *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 726.

might have done”.⁸⁸ The import of Irvine’s, Carnduff’s and Edwards’ and Fullwood’s remarks provides a notable corrective to Hewitt’s stating as an “important fact” in 1980, “the total lack of literary interest among unionists of the north, the lack of any fixed literary tradition”.⁸⁹ Hewitt’s sentiments more accurately reflect a catastrophic academic malaise that has led to a comprehensive failure to engage effectively with Protestant cultures by challenging blanket, ultimately proscriptive identity labels like “unionists of the north”, or exploring as a viable concept the idea of a “fixed literary tradition” in regard to Northern Ireland, indeed anywhere.

There is evidence to indicate that this critical indifference continues. Interviewed in 1996, Colin Bateman, a Protestant author of four best selling novels, remarked that he could not get sponsorship from the local press, specifically Blackstaff, or elicit a “response from the [local] intelligentsia generally ... the Arts Council-type coterie”. Bateman perceived this was because he lacked a “University background” and was disinclined to “analyse things or search for their meaning”.⁹⁰ Bateman’s view of his status in relation to the Arts Council’s and Blackstaff’s evaluative criteria offers a

⁸⁸ D. Fullwood and O. Edwards, “Ulster poetry since 1900”, *Rann*, 20, (June 1953), 20.

⁸⁹ J. Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, “Beyond the Planter and the Gael”, *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 728.

⁹⁰ C. Bateman quoted in D. Molloy, “Pump-action fiction”, *Fortnight*, 348, (March 1996), 33-34.

notable contrast to the reverence and considerable practical support these bodies afforded to Hewitt that underpinned his startling transformation to exemplary Protestant after forty years of neglect. In an atmosphere of rising antipathy towards a reactionary 'Protestant state', Hewitt's claim to be an atheist, man of the left, cultural visionary and victim of the Unionist 'establishment' led to him being regarded as a uniquely 'sexy' Protestant: one that wasn't. Accordingly, Hewitt became a figurehead for Northern intellectuals who, working through the auspices of the Arts Council and the academy, exploited his image as the 'acceptable' voice of dissent as a means to defend critical autonomy, and create a space apart from the unattractive choices to engage either with a 'compromised' ruling class within Northern Ireland or an ascendant romantic nationalism. It is, therefore, essential that Hewitt's role as a cultural missionary to, in Edna Longley's phrase, Northern Ireland's "savage quarters" is investigated.⁹¹

⁹¹ E. Longley, *The Living Stream* (1994), 127.

CHAPTER 4

JOHN HEWITT : CULTURAL CRUSADER?

Northern Ireland's war time isolation was the bleak catalyst for John Hewitt's interest in regionalism which he pursued through his job as Museum assistant and work on the vernacular poets of north east Antrim. In "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947), Hewitt argued that to retain individual integrity Western man needed to reject the narrative of the nation and look to the region:

Regionalism is based upon the conviction that, as man is a social being, he must, now that the nation has become an enormously complicated organisation, find some smaller unit to which to give his loyalty. This unit, since the day of the clan is over and that of the large family is passing, must be grounded on something more than kinship. Between these limits lies the region; an area which possesses geographical and economic coherence, which has had some sort of traditional and historical identity and which still, in some measure, demonstrates cultural and linguistic individuality....

.....
 ...Ulster, considered as a region and not as the symbol of any particular creed, can, I believe, command the loyalty of every one of its inhabitants.¹

Northern Ireland's involvement in the Second World War re-energised British cultural identity there. In 1947, Hewitt's vision of 'Ulster' as a distinct region provides a literary counterpart to Unionism's moves to

¹ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 122.

secure political autonomy while simultaneously consolidating a British identity. Gill McIntosh explores the parallels between heightened cultural awareness during the period that incorporated the Festival of Britain in 1951, Unionist attempts to advance the idea of Northern Ireland as a “distinctive place with its own individual identity”, and the “wider literary movement in the province”. McIntosh highlights Unionist essayist Hugh Shearman’s remark in 1949 that in “temperament and culture ... the people of Northern Ireland are British”, and identifies a contradiction in an “official aspect of [a] self-image” that claimed to be “distinctive”, yet simultaneously promoted the North as a “little England”.² Notably, Shearman’s emphasis is consistent with Hewitt’s contemporary view that:

There can be no such thing as Ulster poetry ... We simply have poets of Ulster birth ... for most of the Ulster poets Irish has never been the folk-tongue, that assonance falls strangely upon our ears, that we think Wordsworth a better poet than Mangan.³

² G. McIntosh, “Sam Hanna Bell and *December Bride* : reflections on post-war Ulster”, *Honest Ulsterman*, 98, (Autumn 1994), 55.

³ J. Hewitt, “Poetry and Ulster : a survey”, *Poetry Ireland*, 8, (January 1950), 5, 7. Typically inconsistent, in 1983 Hewitt told Sam McAughtry that while studying for his MA on the ‘rhyming weavers’ in this context he had been, “very conscious of the fact that there were poets in such places as Armagh whose work was set down in Irish”. Hewitt quoted in S. McAughtry, “Trying to make sense of the North”, *Irish Times*, 25.07.1983, 10. Analysing Hewitt’s work on the ‘weaver poets’, P. Walsh contends, “although he notes Henry McDonald Fletcher’s use of Irish language-derived words ... Hewitt dismisses this as ‘Celtic colouring ... picked up from books’”. See “In search of the Rhyming Weavers”, *Causeway*, 3, 4, (1996), 42. In *The Redress of Poetry* (1995), 196, Seamus Heaney observed that while “Hewitt was ... sympathetic to the older culture and literature of Ireland ... its incorporation was not part of his intellectual project. The fact that Gaelic was a dying language was enough for Hewitt to absolve himself of any imaginative obligation to the Gaelic order”.

Hewitt's comments are evidence that Alan Warner's note that he looked to "an Irish heritage that includes the whole of Ireland and the whole Irish past" is inappropriate.⁴ Similarly, reappraising the 1930s and 1940s, Edna Longley identified Hewitt as one of a "small number of cultural missionaries" whose regionalism was a "new way of thinking about the North" that extended "cultural-political vistas" and "rephrased the political impasse which had blocked socialist advance";⁵ Hewitt's "cross-sectarian collective effort ... helped to energise writers [and the] recovery of literary history".⁶ Writing in 1987, Longley's emphasis on the primacy of regionalist ideas in the history of Northern Irish writing is justified but, like Warner's idealised portrait of Hewitt, her estimate of his regionalism as an innovative, "cross-sectarian" strategy and, by implication, an imaginative precursing of the artistic flowering in the 1960s, is unsound.⁷

In 1950 Hewitt wrote, "the conscious regionalist outlook has been confined to Roy McFadden and myself, and as yet McFadden is not wholly

⁴ A. Warner, Introduction, *The Selected John Hewitt*, (1991 (1981)).

⁵ E. Longley, "Progressive Bookmen", *The Living Stream*, (1994), 125. (An edited version of "Progressive Bookmen", *Irish Review*, 1, (1986), 50-57.)

⁶ E. Longley, "John Hewitt, 1907-1987", *Fortnight*, 254, (September 1987), 22.

⁷ E. Longley quoted in F. Ormsby, Introduction, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991). See also Longley, "John Hewitt, 1907-1987", *Fortnight*, 254, (September 1987), 22.

committed to it”.⁸ Writing to Montague in 1964, Hewitt explicitly avoided identification with a wider regionalist ‘movement’:

I was the only person to call himself a regionalist and had no disciples - I never have had any - but it was amusing to watch the word *Regional* catch on ... my critics inadvertently spread my gospel by their unstinted attacks.⁹ [Hewitt’s emphasis]

Hewitt’s claim to have been a lone prophet of regionalism in the 1940s is surprising. In “The bitter gourd” (1945), for example, he wrote that “regionalism is in the air”, and, when associate editor of *Lagan* in 1947, he referred to the magazine as “the recognised organ of Ulster regionalism”.¹⁰ In 1946, John Boyd noted *Lagan*’s aim to “begin a literary tradition springing out of the life and speech of this province”.¹¹ In 1949, Robert Greacen identified a “growing school of Ulster regionalism”, and later reappraised the phenomenon as a war-time “vogue ... fostered by

⁸ J. Hewitt, “Poetry and Ulster : a survey”, *Poetry Ireland*, 8, (January 1950), 9. In “No dusty pioneer”, Roy McFadden discussed his and Hewitt’s interest in regionalism: “for some time after [Hewitt] had begun his romance with Ulster Regionalism, I continued with a romantic Irishness ... he ... valued me not only as a friend but also as a lieutenant in an Ulster Regionalist crusade. When I finally cooled and backed away, I suppose he felt disappointment and perhaps resentment.” See G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place* (1991), 169, 176.

⁹ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster at Coleraine. [JHC]

¹⁰ J. Hewitt, “Regionalism : the last chance”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 124.

¹¹ J. Boyd, “Comment”, *Lagan*, 2, 1, (1946), 1.

Americans Robert Frost and Lewis Mumford”.¹² In 1953, Howard Sergeant observed that while regionalist ideas never “foster[ed] a special movement”, their most interesting feature was the variety of local poets they attracted including Louis MacNeice, W. R. Rodgers, Roy McFadden, Robert Greacen and John Hewitt.¹³ From a contemporary perspective, James Loughlin marks as “noteworthy” the “pro-Unionist Ulster poet, Revd. W. R. Rodgers’ ... attempt to establish a regional or ‘national’ personality” for the ‘Ulsterman’ in the 1940s, whose “characteristics ... ‘mark him off from the other people of Ireland’”.¹⁴ Together with the evidence of Hewitt’s “No rootless colonist” (1972), where he recalls that he had been “far from alone” in exploring regionalism which was all part of a “general movement”, the evidence of his peers is consistent with John Wilson Foster’s view that, while Hewitt accorded regionalism “more urgent significance than did his fellow regionalists in Britain”, the ideas themselves were “inherited”. Expanding on the character of, and widespread interest in regionalism, Foster observes:

¹² R. Greacen, “Contemporary Irish writing”, *Life and Letters*, 16, 140 (April 1949), 8. See also, Greacen, “John Hewitt : a personal tribute”, *Ulster Tatler*, (8 November 1983), 74.

¹³ H. Sergeant, “Ulster regionalism”, *Rann*, 20, (June 1953), 4.

¹⁴ J. Loughlin, “Ulster, Labour and national identity 1945-51”, *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, (1995), 142. Exploring post-war Unionism, Loughlin identifies W. R. Rodgers as “pro-Unionist” through an outline of his definitions of ‘Ulster’ and ‘Ulstermen’. Loughlin quoted from W. R. Rodgers, *The Ulstermen And Their Country*, (1947).

In the 1940s, regionalism was very much in the air the British writers were breathing, and was a near-synonym for the Celticism (Welsh, Scottish, Irish) that was a geographic strain of the dominant Romanticism of the period. The journal *Poetry Scotland*, for example, in which the Ulster poet John Hewitt's poems appeared, was seen as a regional counter-force to *Poetry London*.¹⁵

Introducing *Across a Roaring Hill : the Protestant imagination in modern Ireland* (1985), Dawe and Longley pre-empted Foster's analysis of Hewitt's regionalism, which they observed was "part-inspired by Scottish and Welsh movements ... pragmatically contracted, rather than mystically expansive". By contrast to Foster, who identified Hewitt's regional definitions as being "not too precise, and not politically precise at all in the Irish north's case", Dawe and Longley stressed his superlative pragmatism. Dawe's and Longley's emphasis distances Hewitt from a potentially revolutionary, romantic regionalism. To Longley especially, battling against an ascendant, seditiously homogenising nationalism that rose in tandem with the Troubles, this discrete image of Hewitt was crucial.

From the early 1970s, Hewitt was increasingly seen as a figure of peculiar cultural significance.¹⁶ In 1972, Terence Brown reflected on

¹⁵ J. W. Foster, *Colonial Consequences*, (1991), 278.

¹⁶ A random survey of journal essays and newspaper articles on Hewitt illustrates: Editorial, "Not outcast on the world", *Irish Times*, 25.03.1972; E. Boland, "The clash of identities - II", *Irish Times*, 04.04.1974, 14; N. Kiely, "John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock", *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6; T. Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael : interview with John Hewitt and John Montague", *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies* (The Northern Issue), (1980), 722-729; B. Olinder, "Ulsterman of planter stock", H. Kosok, ed., *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature*, (1982), 376-389; S. McAughtry, "Trying to make sense of the North", *Irish Times*, 25.07.1983, 10; F. Mullan, "The poetry of tribal

Hewitt's relevance for contemporary perceptions of poets' social responsibilities:

In Hewitt's conception of the regionalist poet, the poet must, however, do more than explore the past, celebrate and record the life of his region. He has a deeper, more significant role to play. His work ... must in a sense become the region. It must embody the best aspects, the distinctive worth of the region's slowly developed culture.¹⁷

Enlarging on these comments, Brown quoted from Hewitt's 'Overture for Ulster regionalism' (1946). Typifying emergent foci on Hewitt's putative missionary impulse, Brown contended that in this poem Hewitt "speaks of the linguistic constituents of the province's dialect, suggesting that from its idiosyncratic blend a unique poetry must develop":

Our speech is a narrow speech, the rags and remnants
Of Tudor rogues and stiff Scots Covenanters,
curt soldierly dispatches and puritan sermons,
with a jap or two of glaar from the tangled sheugh,
the cross-roads solo and the penny ballad.

.....

We can make something of it, something hard
and clean and honest as the basalt cliffs,

loyalties", *Fortnight*, 241, (June 1986), 22; J. Montague, "Spiritual maverick", *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 17-18; P. Devlin, "No rootless colonist", *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 22-23; G. Watts, "John Hewitt : the nonconformist conscience of Northern Ireland", M.Lit., Trinity : Dublin, (1987).

¹⁷ T. Brown, "John Hewitt : an Ulster poet", *Topic 24*, (Fall 1972), 65. See also, "W. R. Rodgers and John Hewitt", D. Dunn, ed., *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, (1975), 81-97, and "John Hewitt : land and people", *Northern Voices*, (1975), 86-97.

Brown's view that 'Overture for an Ulster literature' (retitled 'Overture for Ulster regionalism' in 1948), reflected Hewitt's experimental imperative in 1946 is supported by the evidence of Hewitt's comments one year earlier in "The bitter gourd" (1945), that the "Ulster writer ... must be a *rooted* man, must carry the native tang of his idiom like the native dust on his sleeve". [Hewitt's emphasis] In 1950, however, four years after writing 'Overture for Ulster regionalism', Hewitt insisted there was "no such thing as Ulster poetry", and disregarded the influence of the Irishry's "strange assonance" on 'Ulster' poets. In 1953, Hewitt identified his 'native idiom' as "standard Ulster-English of which I am one of the better exponents, and a dialect of my own devising for use when talking with country people".¹⁸ Crucially, the rhythms of Hewitt's 'standard Ulster-English' are distinguished by his admiration for William Allingham whose accents he considered "authentically Irish without parading a tinge of the shamrock ... a touch of the brogue".¹⁹ Also in 1953, Howard Sergeant noted that "Hewitt normally confined himself to the pastoral tradition of Clare, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost ... he was a little out of his depth when he extended his scope beyond that".²⁰ Robert Greacen too observed that Hewitt's use of

¹⁸ J. Hewitt, "Planter's gothic", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 13.

¹⁹ J. Hewitt, "Davis, Mangan, Ferguson", BBC Radio Ulster, 19.10.1974. Hewitt's earlier approval of A. P. Graves' record of Allingham's "soft Donegal accent" in "No rootless colonist" (1972) illustrates his tendency to be inconsistent.

²⁰ H. Sergeant, "Ulster regionalism", *Rann*, 20, (June 1953), 4.

“idiomatic speech” was conservative, only inadvertently and “indirectly ... mark[ing] off ... peculiarly ‘Ulster’ contours ... Hewitt is attracted by words like ‘kibes’, good, sound Elizabethan coinage that has disappeared from much spoken English, and by pithy Scots words brought across the Irish Sea by 17thc Colonists”.²¹ Significantly, Hewitt agreed with Greacen’s view that, “Ulster’s literary background ... [has] ... little or no trace of Gaelicism ... We turn naturally to the main English literary tradition”.²² Despite this evidence of Hewitt’s exclusive linguistic loyalties, when he discusses Hewitt’s “conception of the regionalist poet”, Brown absolves him of the responsibility for not fulfilling the poet’s “task of social comprehension and cultural amelioration”. Brown explains:

Yet it would be churlish to blame this failure on any deficiency in Hewitt’s effort. The fault surely lies with the province, for rejecting in the political and cultural/religious sphere any possibility of integration, (as it often appears to do) it must surely also reject the poet who encourages cultural synthesis.²³

Notably, however, in 1975 Brown revised this reading of Hewitt, suggesting that he “remain[ed] a minor poet because in the end, despite the

²¹ R. Greacen, “Contemporary Irish writing”, *Life and Letters*, 16, 140 (April 1949), 7.

²² R. Greacen, “The poetry of W. R. Rodgers”, *Rann*, 14, (December 1951), 14.

²³ T. Brown, “John Hewitt : an Ulster poet”, *Topic 24 : A Journal of the Liberal Arts*, (Fall 1972), 66.

integrity of his vision, imaginatively he does not know enough”.²⁴ Intriguingly, in the same year, Brown re-evaluated Hewitt’s regionalism as an imaginative awareness of, “the relation of man to his environment, the shaping and controlling of consciousness by locale, climate and topography. The region provides a ready-formed laboratory for observing these processes at work”.²⁵ Brown’s shifting perspectives on Hewitt exemplify the incautious haste with which he was elevated to cultural exemplar in the early 1970s. Tellingly, they contrast significantly with Patrick Kavanagh’s pertinent note on Northern Ireland’s literati in 1948. Observing the ‘laboratory’ from Dublin, Kavanagh clearly perceived an ongoing process of cultural imperialism and declared, “up in the North they are determined to produce a native culture or ‘lose a fall’”.²⁶

A comparison between Brown’s and Kavanagh’s divergent views of regionalist ideas in the 1940s indicates that in the modern context, re-estimates of Hewitt’s negotiations with them have been largely superficial. Consequently, chronic inconsistencies have gone undetected or ignored. Set firmly in context and juxtaposed with the evidence of his peers, a significant

²⁴ T. Brown, “W. R. Rodgers and John Hewitt”, D. Dunn, ed., *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, (1975), 95. In 1991, Brown responded to R. McFadden’s memoir on Hewitt’s fascination with Jung, “No dusty pioneer” (1986), by acknowledging that he may have underestimated Hewitt. See T. Brown, “John Hewitt : an Ulster of the mind”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), passim.

²⁵ T. Brown, *Northern Voices*, (1975), 93.

²⁶ P. Kavanagh, “Poetry in Ireland to-day”, *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 42.

dichotomy emerges between Hewitt's thinking and Brown's estimate of it in 1972 as an innovative missionary impulse. Specifically, regionalist ideas did not impact on Hewitt's exclusive literary and linguistic loyalties. Hewitt's cautious approach to 'Ulster' literature is an interesting obverse of worker-poet and playwright Thomas Carnduff's rhetorical bravado in the same context. In *Young Ulster Magazine*, Carnduff exhorted readers to "remember that our literature, poetry, and drama are Irish and should remain Irish. The moment we remove our provincial dialect from our Literature and drama, so soon will we develop into a second-rate English county".²⁷ Blaming "the middle-class for the stagnancy in Ulster writing for 'they set our literary standards'",²⁸ Carnduff founded the Young Ulster Society in 1938 to instil "enthusiasm into a movement which might encourage a new interest in all forms of art in Ulster".²⁹ By 1940, the Society had a 140 strong mixed membership drawn from across Belfast's social spectrum, including writers, artists, representatives of "practically every profession and trade in the city ... [as well as] ... bank clerks, typists

²⁷ T. Carnduff, Editorial, *Young Ulster*, 1, 1, (1938). Noel Carnduff asserts that his father wrote this.

²⁸ T. Carnduff quoted in Anon, "Mr. T. Carnduff honoured by Young Ulster Society", *Belfast News Letter*, 14.02.1954, 6.

²⁹ T. Carnduff quoted in J. Gray, ed., *Thomas Carnduff: Life and Writings*, (1994), 42. Carnduff's first two plays opened at the Abbey Theatre Dublin in 1932 (*Workers*) and 1933 (*Machinery*) respectively. The Ulster Theatre, Belfast, first accepted and subsequently rejected *Workers*, judging it incompatible with the theatre's repertoire "because of its working-class tendencies". For a discussion of the staging of Carnduff's plays see S. H. Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, (1972) and J. Gray, ed., *Thomas Carnduff: Life and Writings*, (1994).

and artisans”.³⁰ May Morton’s remark that, “in Northern Ireland it was not easy to keep a liberal non-sectarian society alive”, indicates that the Society aspired to this goal.³¹ While it was occasionally criticised for “lack of adventure [and] a one-sided exhibition of knowledge”, John Gray observes that the Society, “remained the only significant forum for cultural discussion in Belfast well into the 1950s”.³² In 1944, the Society’s debate, “Has Ulster a distinctive tradition in the Arts?”, reflected topical interest and produced a variety of opinions. Denis Ireland identified an “admixture of Anglo Irish and Gaelic thought but no purely Ulster tradition”; McFadden cautioned that “Ulster had no parallel” to Welsh or Scottish regional movements; Morton “deplored the fact that education was so very pro English” because she considered this detrimental to the prospect of a distinctive ‘Ulster’ literature; a Miss Henry agreed, perceiving Ulster literature as the “daughter of Irish tradition”: J. Kennedy “looked for the day of reintegration with all Ireland without losing our idiosyncrasies”. Kennedy tellingly concluded, “the question [was] not so easy as it looked on the surface as borders were not easy to define especially in literature”,

³⁰ J. Gray, *Thomas Carnduff : Life and Writings*, (1994), 42. Some surviving membership lists of the Society number 200.

³¹ M. Morton quoted in Anon, “Mr. T. Carnduff honoured by Young Ulster Society”, *Belfast News Letter*, 14.02.1954, 6.

³² J. Gray, *Thomas Carnduff : Life and Writings*, (1994), 42.

and the debate ended amicably “in agreement that Ulster had not as yet a distinctive tradition in the Arts”.³³

Writing six years later in 1950, Hewitt’s claim that “there can be no such thing as Ulster poetry” implies he broadly agreed with the consensus of the Young Ulster Society debate.³⁴ In 1953, however, Hewitt signalled a remarkable volte-face:

So when at the end of the century Anglo-Irish literature entered a new and lively period under the leadership of W. B. Yeats and George Russell (AE) ... it was as native to this island that the Ulster poets enlisted in the movement - Moira O’Neill, Alice Milligan, Joseph Campbell, James H. Cousins; and it is but logical the poets of the mid-twentieth century should have already approached or even, a few, reached the regionalist position....

.....
 ...Having ceased to be a colony, and having become, whether we like the word or not, a region, there are signs that we are already expressing ourselves in a distinctive literature ... We are a little people, but we will be heard.³⁵

Also in 1953, Hewitt identified his doughty “little people”, claiming kinship to a “proud people” with a “habit of acclaiming our achievements in industry and commerce”. Nodding to political realities Hewitt asked, “now that we are marking our territory in literature ... Can we ... accept all books

³³ Young Ulster Society, Minute Book, 3, 1943-1947. 12.12.1944. AMs. Carnduff Papers : In Private Hands.

³⁴ J. Hewitt, “Poetry and Ulster : a survey”, *Poetry Ireland*, 8, (January 1950), 8.

³⁵ J. Hewitt, “The course of writing in Ulster”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 76.

written within the Province, or must we limit the area to the six counties?"

Merging 'colony' with 'region' with 'Province', Hewitt foreclosed rhetorical possibilities to conclude:

Since men in Ulster started writing effectively in English about 1700, a sufficient body of work has grown up which has sought to express the landscape, the history, the language and the folk of this Province ... to warrant our claim that we have a literature or something very like it.³⁶

Hewitt's comments are markedly consistent with the prevailing 'givens' of the period. In 1951, for example, J. N. Browne writes:

The cleavage of races and ideals brought about by the Plantation of Ulster is still evident in the complexities of our social structure, and ... in our literature. The separation of Northern Ireland politically from the rest of the country has had, however, an interesting result in stimulating a regional movement, a certain attitude of self-sufficiency among artists and writers, and in directing their attention to what lies nearest to hand.³⁷

Browne's essay was published in 1952 in *The Arts in Ulster*, a government-sponsored book produced by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (Northern Ireland) during the Festival of Britain. The book's provenance indicates that it mirrored an 'establishment' view of the state of 'Ulster' arts. Juxtaposed with the evidence of Hewitt's volte-face, it reinforces the significant correspondences between Browne's and Hewitt's

³⁶ J. Hewitt, "We are marking our place in literature", *Belfast Telegraph*, 07.12.1953, 8.

³⁷ J. N. Browne, "Poetry in Ulster", S. H. Bell, ed., *The Arts in Ulster*, (1951), 131.

analyses of an evolving, autonomous regional literature, neither of which exudes a ground-breaking, radical dynamic.

Hewitt's essay, "Winter 1950-1951", offers further evidence that his thinking broadly conformed to the status quo in his pre Coventry period. Introducing *Rann's* readers to 'Ulster's' "literary inheritance", Hewitt declared that, "the verse of a mere twenty-five years" between 1800 and 1825 had been obscured by the "proud materialism of our progressive economy". Hewitt continued:

There are ... two major strands, the *Colonial*, verses based on contemporary English practice, by clergymen, doctors, gentlewomen, in couplet or blank, and the *Vernacular*, the verses of the weaver and the country schoolmaster phrased in their own idiom, the branch of the great Lallans tree which still flourishes across the Moyle. There is a third element only just perceptible, that which shows an awareness that both colonies were in Ireland, not in New England.³⁸ [Hewitt's emphasis]

The evidence of these comments runs counter to Longley's claim that Hewitt's "regionalism, the quest for 'a native mode', certainly improved on textbook socialism as a stimulus" to his work.³⁹ Specifically, the evidence of "Winter 1950-1951" and "We are marking our place in literature" indicates that for Hewitt 'Ulster's' literary history begins at 1700, and develops with the culture and language of professional, industrial and

³⁸ J. Hewitt, "Winter 1950-1951", *Rann*, 11, (Winter 1950-51), 1-2.

³⁹ E. Longley, *The Living Stream* (1994), 126.

commercial peoples and peoples writing in English: the ‘planter’ peoples of his regionalist anthems, ‘Once alien here’ (1942), ‘The colony’ (1949-50) and ‘Colonial consequence’ (1953), who claim “rights drawn from the soil and sky / the use, the pace, the patient years of labour”. Moreover, in “Winter 1950-51” Hewitt unwittingly confirmed an exclusive vision when he continued:

Our writing-men, who might learn something of our linguistic habit, of our natural gestures of thought and imagination, from the successes and failures of their predecessors, have their gaze fixed in another direction. Altogether, this remembering the wrong things, and the right things for the wrong reasons, has impoverished us as a people. (1)

Hewitt’s reference to “natural gestures”, his regretting the misdirected gaze and subsequent impoverishment is ironic; embedded with a telling, multiple use of kinship metaphors his comments narrowly embrace ‘us’ and allow an “only just perceptible” glimpse of ‘them’, that “third element” warily adverted to in ‘Once alien here’ (1942):

The sullen Irish limping to the hills
bore with them the enchantments and the spells
that in the clans’ free days hung gay and rich
on every twig of every thorny hedge,
and gave the rain-pocked stone a meaning past
the blurred engraving of the fibrous frost.

So, I, because of all the buried men
in Ulster clay, because of rock and glen
and moist and cloud and quality of air
as native in my thought as any here,
who now would seek a native mode to tell
our stubborn wisdom individual,
yet lacking skill in either scale of song,

the graver English, lyric Irish tongue,
 must let this rich earth so enhance the blood
 with steady pulse where now is plunging mood
 till thought and image may, identified,
 find easy voice to utter each aright.

Thomas Kinsella has observed that, while Hewitt's poetry lacks the "character and capacity of Pope or Auden ... some of it is valuable for its complete presentation in a determined pentameter, of the colonial mentality".⁴⁰ Interpreted beside the evidence of his essays on 'Ulster literature', Hewitt's 'Once alien here' reveals his tendency to strip his criteria of the "slow, obstinate, papish burn" of the "sullen Irish" and their native "enchantments".⁴¹ Nevertheless, Robert Johnstone insists that Hewitt's socialism and lack of "belief in a distinctively Ulster tradition" enabled him to "explore this remote province in his verse intelligently and without apology"; Hewitt "provided a coherent and intellectually respectable background", making it "possible for younger writers to treat their province as a source rather than a weakness".⁴² Like Longley's interpretation of Hewitt's "quest for a 'native mode'", Johnstone's comments inevitably raise the question of which writers and what

⁴⁰ T. Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition*, (1995), 117.

⁴¹ S. Heaney quoted in S. Deane, "Unhappy and at home", *Crane Book of Irish Studies*, (Northern Issue) 1, 1, (1977), 67.

⁴² R. Johnstone, "John Hewitt : A Protestant atheist", *Fortnight*, 157, (November 1977), 5-6.

'traditional and historical identities' he refers to. Examined in context, Hewitt's engagement with 'Ulster's' "best aspects" was unoriginal; when it is considered beside his unwavering adherence to a radical tradition with "strong British roots - not Irish roots, there were no Irish Levellers, no Irish Diggers",⁴³ it indicates that he has more affinity with a reactionary, 'cultural unionism' which, T. Canavan contends, "is based on the idea that 'Ulster' encapsulates a Protestant-British ethos which makes it impossible to engage with Irishness in any form".⁴⁴ Indeed, it might also be argued that Hewitt's purposeful relegation of Gaelic influences effects a damning act of linguistic imperialism which, Robert Phillipson contends, is the "primary component of cultural imperialism".⁴⁵

Hewitt's criteria for 'Ulster's' 'regional literature' partly reflected the impact of Partition. Recalling Denis Ireland's remark that "partition had created a wall cutting across a common Irish culture", McFadden observed that "if this was so, my generation had been born on one side of that wall and it required a conscious effort to dig through to an 'Irish tradition'".⁴⁶

⁴³ J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

⁴⁴ T. Canavan, "Neo-Unionism", *Books Ireland*, 202, (March 1997), 50.

⁴⁵ In *Linguistic Imperialism*, (1992), R. Phillipson discusses methodological uses of monolingualism in establishing "democratic social ideas" and identifies the two most central labels in colonialist cultural mythology as 'tribe' and 'dialect', their use establishing differentiation from - and 'stigmatization' by - a dominant group. (39)

⁴⁶ S. Ferris, "'One Who Stayed': an interview with Roy McFadden", *Irish Studies Review*, 17, (Winter 1996/7), 22.

Like Greacen and Hewitt, McFadden was not drawn to Gaelic culture. An urban poet, McFadden judged “the insistence on the past, on the duty of conforming with the Gaelic mode, is enough to frustrate and weary the most vigorous of us”. However, unlike Hewitt’s absorption in English pastorals and ‘plantation’ myths in the 1940s, McFadden engaged pragmatically with new experiences:

We are faced with the problem of creating a literary tradition in the north; but, though it must inevitably be strongly influenced by contemporary happenings in English poetry, there is no reason why we should not absorb that influence and build it into something of our own. Sometimes I think we are the least English part of Ireland....

...I am aware that Mr. John Hewitt has written some charming poetry in the English pastoral tradition ... but I cannot help feeling that literature should be the expression of new experience. I would like to see a sincere interpretation of life in the drab city of Belfast, with its dogma and its patient hates; for our industrialism differs in many ways from English industrialism and offers something new to the imaginative writer....

...The time has come for the would-be Wild Geese among us to build a nest in Dublin or Belfast (preferably Belfast) and lay an egg or two.⁴⁷

McFadden’s remarks illumine the wider context in which Hewitt sturdily adhered to English literary traditions, insisted on the supremacy of “standard Ulster-English” and comprehensively dismissed Gaelic ‘folk culture’. Arguably, they render inapt Clyde’s view that the “driving force of [Hewitt’s] regionalism is not tribalism or parochialism, but a concern with

⁴⁷ R. McFadden and G. Taylor, “Poetry in Ireland”, *The Bell*, 6, 4, (1943), 343, 345.

over-centralisation, standardisation and dogma”.⁴⁸ Indeed, Greacen’s and Hewitt’s similarly reductive approaches to the “linguistic constituents of the province’s dialect” characterise the complacency that Carnduff perceived was endemic in Northern Ireland’s small, middle-class coterie of university educated writers during the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁹ Greacen and Hewitt do differ in that the former ranks with a younger generation of pacifist poets, including McFadden; Greacen’s poem, ‘John Hewitt’ (1948), memorably depicts the older poet as, “Sports jacket, corduroys, red tie. / A voice in Belfast middle-class / Proclaims the Marxist line of ‘38”.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, McFadden’s complaint in 1945-6 that, “our poets in particular lack integration and too often write from a knowledge of verse and not from a genuine creative drive”, is justified.⁵¹ Ostensibly, Hewitt’s comment in “The bitter gourd” (1945) that “our most troublesome and deeply fissured

⁴⁸ T. Clyde, “A stirring in the dry bones”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 255.

⁴⁹ Largely from Protestant backgrounds, Hewitt referred to his contemporaries as, “fellow Ulstermen of Letters”, and considered Carnduff “unique”. See, J. Hewitt, “The Carnduff lecture”, AMs, Unpublished paper presented to the Arts Council, (May 1974 (1960)), JHC. Hewitt’s ‘Mister Faintheart Middleclass’ (1927) observes, “When I see workless men I hurry by / Lest I should seem to mock their wretchedness, / For food, and fire, and roof and books have I, / And comfortable dress...”. Hewitt’s Notebook 45, records that this, “title was quoted against me during a lecture, W.C.L.C[?] that winter [?]”. Robert Greacen recalled he and Hewitt shared a “very different range of references” to Carnduff’s, and that like most of Northern Ireland’s liberal ‘intellectuals’ in the 1940s their ideas were formed from Bernard Shaw’s dictum: ‘bring the working class up to our standard bourgeois style’, and added, “Roy McFadden didn’t do that”. Greacen interviewed by S. Ferris, John Hewitt International Summer School, 2 August 1996.

⁵⁰ R. Greacen, *Collected Poems 1944-1994*, (1995), 141.

⁵¹ R. McFadden, “A note on contemporary Ulster writing”, *Northman*, 14, 2, (1946), 21.

problem has been ... the lack of integration of Ulster's peoples" implies he agrees with McFadden.⁵² On the other hand, Hewitt's sustained adherence to the conservative view that, "an indigenous Ulster Poetry" would emerge only from a successful synthesis of the "intellectual ... and Clare kind of vision", runs counter to Dawe's and Longley's focus on his innovatory pragmatics.⁵³ Arguably, therefore, re-estimates of Hewitt as having negotiated an idiosyncratic mediatorial role or spearheaded a "new way of thinking about the north"⁵⁴ reflect a critical dialogue distressed by factional politics. Specifically, when investigated in context, Hewitt's vision of 'Ulster' literature's "cultural and linguistic individuality" could not, as Tom Clyde, Gerald Dawe, Ian Duhig, John Wilson Foster, Edna Longley and others maintain, have appealed "across sectarian boundaries",⁵⁵ nor would he, as Frank Ormsby contends, have been considered an "evangelist, propagandist and hard-headed realist".⁵⁶

Aside from Kinsella's polemic rebuttal of Hewitt's "sniggering" provincialism,⁵⁷ Richard Kirkland provides a rare, pertinent critique of his

⁵² J. Hewitt's and R. McFadden's use of the similar phrase, "lack of integration" highlights the topicality of the subject.

⁵³ J. Hewitt, "Poetry and Ulster : a survey", *Poetry Ireland*, 8, (January 1950), 10.

⁵⁴ E. Longley, "Progressive Bookmen", *The Living Stream*, (1994), 125.

⁵⁵ G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, Introduction, *The Poet's Place*, (1991).

⁵⁶ F. Ormsby, Introduction, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991).

⁵⁷ T. Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition*, (1995), 120.

role as, in P. O'Doherty's phrase, "a sort of Protestant saint".⁵⁸ Questioning Hewitt's exemplary status as "The daddy of us all?", in 1994 Kirkland dispensed with simplistic binary oppositions to aim a laconic broadside at portraits of Hewitt as "lone voice of sanity amidst the clamour of sectarian atavisms". Advocating a modernist reading of Hewitt, which he defines as "a methodology which sees the poem as self-contained and richly ambiguous within its own parameters", Kirkland suggested this would better "explore the dark irreconcilables of violence and difference which haunt his work". Potentially, this could reveal "much of Hewitt's poetry to be a desperate search for answers conducted through poetic language seemingly inadequate to the expressive needs of the writer": provide the means through which Hewitt "*can* become truly representative of the contemporary state of Northern Ireland cultural politics".⁵⁹ [Kirkland's emphasis] However, while it purports to challenge interpretations of Hewitt's poetry as "bald definitions of identity and intent", Kirkland's alternative reading effectively defers to the regressive critical 'givens' that are characteristic of, for example, Seamus Deane in the mid 1970s. Kirkland's emphasis on Hewitt's "dark irreconcilables of violence and difference" and 'inadequate' poetic obliquely echoes Deane's comment that "identity is ... deeply and

⁵⁸ P. O'Doherty, "Protestant saint", *Causeway*, 1, 4, (Autumn 1994), 7.

⁵⁹ R. Kirkland, "The daddy of us all?", *Causeway*, 1, 3, (Summer 1994), 20.

tragically embedded in the Irish political-literary situation”, and his view that begrudgery, or “rejection in acceptance of Ireland ... is typical of the Northern Protestant mind in one of its subtler manifestations”.⁶⁰ Similarly, in “The poetry of John Hewitt” (1980), Seamus Heaney’s stress on Hewitt’s anxiety to retain “an ancestral bond with the mother culture of England ... [as] ... compensation for the new displacement within Ireland which [his] northern planter people suffered in 1921”, places a less strident but equally insistent and subjective emphasis on Protestants as ‘other’.⁶¹ Kirkland does explicitly question Hewitt’s sense of being “amenable to a sense of shared heritage”. Problematically, substituting “cultural analysis” with superlative, “historical and aesthetic models which can accommodate constant re-examination and constant rebeginning”, he neglects to expose the limited potential of Hewitt’s flawed criteria for ‘Ulster’ literature to reconcile disparate aspirations, irrespective of whatever problems of poetic identity he wrestled with, whatever ‘historical’ or critical framework is applied. Accordingly, it might be argued that Kirkland fatally colludes in the “damaging critical practices” he condemns as having “hardened into a morbid pattern of eternal cultural juxtaposition”.⁶² Compare B. Ó

⁶⁰ S. Deane, “Irish poetry and Irish Nationalism”, D. Dunn, ed., *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, (1975), 8, 11.

⁶¹ S. Heaney, *Preoccupations*, (1980), 209.

⁶² R. Kirkland, “The daddy of us all?”, *Causeway*, 1, 3, (Summer 1994), 21.

Seaghdha's reassessment of Hewitt's regionalism which is aimed at challenging Foster's remark that, knowing cultural identity needed time to grow Hewitt, "alert to the difficulties ... did not prescribe the precise extent of the region in question, nor the political form its expression would take. He was content to aspire and wait". Ó Seaghdha asked, "might this not be rephrased as follows: 'Alert to the difficulties, Hewitt avoided them'?"⁶³ By contrast, Kirkland admits no need to "investigate Hewitt's belief in regionalism in any great depth"; rather than lament its failure as an "unrealised political initiative", a more appropriate response would be to consider it:

A mythology which allowed him to imagine a community demarcated along aesthetic and geographical guide-lines. The 'natural', organic allegiance on which it was predicated - its rootedness to the primary soil of Ulster - placed centrally the artist as crucial arbiter of communal judgement and founder of 'emotional unity'... The writer, in mediating the relationship between the individual and the territory, will propose language as a force of unification rather than division and as such must embody rather than signify. (22)

Kirkland's argument runs counter to Hewitt's implacable resistance to Gaelic influences. Like Johnstone's failure to enlarge on his claim that Hewitt provided a "coherent and intellectually respectable background" for young writers, Kirkland does not expand on what he means by "'natural'

⁶³B. Ó. Seaghdha, "Ulster regionalism : the unpleasant facts", *Irish Review*, 8, (1990), 56.

organic allegiance[s]”, define parameters for ‘Ulster’s “primary soil”, or explore the inadequate interrelation between its several ‘poetic traditions’ and Hewitt’s ‘mythology’. In a comment that significantly echoes Brown’s reluctance to criticise Hewitt in 1972, more than twenty years later Kirkland rather lamely concludes, “it does not do to be churlish: [Hewitt’s] work exists as a mythological phenomenon, the benign protector of a poetic tradition in Ulster at a time when it was near total eradication and for this there is every reason to be grateful”.⁶⁴

Kirkland’s insubstantial reference to a singular “poetic tradition in Ulster” is revealing beside Kinsella’s comment on “the state of quarantine in which the linguistic traditions existed until very recently in Ireland”. Kinsella contends that ‘Northern poetry’ is a “journalistic entity rather than a literary one, and with features of propaganda more than of journalism”.⁶⁵ Dismissing the concept of ‘Northern poetry’ as an exculpatory “literary argument”, Kinsella concludes that, “even poetry can have political weight for a community attending fiercely to its borders, where the position of the border, or its existence, is subject to argument”. Interpreted beside Kinsella’s remarks, Hewitt’s designating ‘Ulster’ as “geographically but the northern portion of this island” in “Painting and sculpture in Ulster”, which

⁶⁴ R. Kirkland, “The daddy of us all?”, *Causeway*, 1, 3, (Summer 1994), 23.

⁶⁵ T. Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition*, (1995), 114, 121.

was published in 1951 during the Festival of Britain, is significant. Hewitt writes:

Many centuries ago, when Ireland possessed a distinct culture of its own, the relief sculpture on the high crosses, the intricate illumination of the manuscripts, and the skilful metalwork of the liturgical vessels might have given promise ... of solid development in the arts and of the secure foundations of a durable tradition. But the Christian-Gaelic pattern was smashed by internal strife and invasion from overseas, nowhere more effectively than in the northern Kingdom of Ulster, the most stubborn, the last to fall, and so the more completely liquidated.⁶⁶

Hewitt's euphemistic history of the demise of Irish culture runs counter to Clyde's stress on the supremacy of his regionalism over Howard Sergeant's "case for the uniqueness of Ulster" in 1953 in "Ulster regionalism".⁶⁷ Ostensibly, Clyde objected to Sergeant's remark that, "the colonisation of Ulster by Scottish and English protestants early in the seventeenth century was a contributing factor to this distinction, in idiom, temperament, sense of humour and religious propensity between the Northerner and his fellow Irishmen".⁶⁸ Clyde complained that Sergeant made "the Plantation sound like a pleasant outing". Arguably, Clyde misinterpreted Sergeant to deflect attention from the real source of his antagonism which was Sergeant's

⁶⁶ J. Hewitt, "Painting and sculpture in Ulster", S. H. Bell, ed., *The Arts in Ulster*, (1951), 72.

⁶⁷ T. Clyde quotes from H. Sergeant, "Ulster Regionalism", *Rann*, 20, June, (1953), 3-7.

⁶⁸ T. Clyde, "A stirring in the dry bones", G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet's Place*, (1991), 254.

“dubious assertion” that, “while regionalism offers its contribution to the whole culture of a nation or comity of nations, nationalism is more conducive to cultural isolation”. Sergeant, however, having observed regionalist ‘movements’ in Scotland and Wales, identified and rejected the “aggressive self-consciousness” he detected in, for example, Hugh MacDiarmid; instead, he addressed the potential for incipient racism and exclusivist attitudes in ‘Ulster’ regionalism which he condemned as “detrimental [to] poetry and literature in general”. Sergeant explained:

True regionalism is a movement towards a future in which a balanced life in every community has become the source of local self-respect and human dignity ... to achieve this equilibrium the complexities of existing conditions must be taken fully into account. The poet who neglects or is unable to do so will probably find himself isolated in a mental backwater, at best a local-colourist, at worst a sentimentalist looking to a past that has never existed. As Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, there cannot be any real apprehension of the past without an immediate knowledge of the present.⁶⁹

Sergeant’s comments reveal his sensitivity to the dangers of trying to assert a regional identity without first resolving ‘complex’ local difficulties. By contrast to Sergeant’s pragmatism, Hewitt’s view of history as ‘myth’ is reflected in the curious ambivalence that informed his acknowledgement of a primary, “distinct” Irish culture in “Painting and sculpture in Ulster” (1951), while simultaneously crafting a blueprint for ‘Ulster’s’ literary

⁶⁹H. Sergeant, “Ulster regionalism”, *Rann*, 20, (June 1953), 3.

'revival' that, "completely liquidate[d]" residual Gaelic influences.⁷⁰ As is the case in "Winter 1950-51", in "Painting and sculpture in Ulster" (1951) Hewitt portrayed the "northern Kingdom" as "effectively" a Gaelic wasteland. Artfully reinforcing the North's 'uniqueness', Hewitt's 'history' of 'Ulster' again notably dovetails with the status quo in the post-war context.

It is useful to compare Hewitt's standpoint with Peter McIvor's reappraisal of the concept of an 'Ulster' literature:

The modern debate as to the national status of literature in Ulster began in the pages of *Uladh* ... If Ulster did claim, in theory, to have an independent or regional tradition, it could only be regarded, in practice, as the transmission of a flame which seldom burned brightly, and was always threatened with positive extinction ... nationalist fervour around the turn of the century only illustrates, by contrast, how unionist the literary establishment had been since the seventeenth century ... This, in itself, is not surprising. The plantation of Ulster had wiped out the last important Gaelic tradition in Ireland: thereafter the history of literature in Ulster is a record of cultural domination through a process of almost irreversible anglicization.⁷¹

The contrast between Hewitt's and McIvor's emphases is a crucial barometer of Hewitt's conservatism, his vacillating qualities, and his

⁷⁰ J. Hewitt contended that history is a myth, that, "all our thoughts are mythological". See Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then...younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 14.

⁷¹ P. K. McIvor, "Regionalism in Ulster : an historical perspective", *Irish University Review*, (1983), 10. McIvor asserts "three literary revivals in the province": "proclaimed by the editors of *Uladh* in 1904", a "new awakening in Ulster writing via Robert Greacen", and the "rise of Ulster poets in the 1960s".

tendency to rationalise an intellectual inability to engage radically with the complexities of a colonial legacy. Notwithstanding this evidence, Clyde clearly identifies in Hewitt's regionalism the potential to spearhead a bandwagon of culturally empowered 'fifth provinces' rolling home to Mother Ireland. Like Brown in 1972, in 1991 Clyde unwittingly illustrates the stagnant quality of critical debate in Northern Ireland when he blames the failure of the "Regionalist cause" on the lack of parallel politico-cultural participation in Ulster during the 1940s. Hewitt failed because he was an 'untypical' Ulsterman who had "liberal, humane sympathies", a "primary instinct to live in harmony with nature and with his neighbours" and who, therefore, made a "tactical decision not to tackle head-on the core of our problems".⁷² As is the case with Brown and Kirkland, Clyde maintains a curious protectiveness toward Hewitt, and his commentary typifies the ad hoc approach to his work that has allowed his anomalous engagements with 'Ulster's' literary history to go largely unchallenged.

Like Hewitt's unoriginal approach to "the recovery of ['Ulster's'] literary history", an overview of his boundary politics indicates they were equally ambiguous and conservative. This is central to McFadden's withdrawal from regionalism, "the fashionable word".⁷³ Alert to the danger

⁷² T. Clyde, "A stirring in the dry bones", G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet's Place*, (1991), 256.

⁷³ R. McFadden, "Conversation in a Shaving-Mirror", *Poetry Ireland*, 15, (October 1951), 10. In *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965 : Moments of Danger*, (1996), 30, 51, R. Kirkland notes McFadden's criticism of Hewitt's regionalism

of conflating literary and political purposes, McFadden became exasperated by Hewitt's failure to define clearly what he meant by 'Ulster'. McFadden explains, "Hewitt confessed that his concept of Ulster had omitted that part of it on the west of the Bann. In truth the Hewitt region did not extend beyond the familiar home counties of Antrim and Down".⁷⁴ Writing in 1991, McFadden merely asserts what Hewitt had, with hindsight, finally conceded. Interviewed by Ketznel Levine in 1985, Hewitt admitted his 'Ulster' was made up of "half a dozen regions", his own being "Antrim and Down and a bit of Armagh, the northeast of Ulster".⁷⁵ McFadden is, therefore, being typically mischievous; his incorrigible scepticism had led him elsewhere to complain that, since no valid parameters had ever been defined, "Ulster Regionalism [was simply] John Hewitt talking to himself and a few friends".⁷⁶

and comments, "it is worth noting that McFadden had no better ideas". Kirkland's appraisal of McFadden is interesting beside evidence that McFadden's reserve towards the vogue was based on his perception that, "the essential beginning is with the individual person". See "Reviews", *Rann*, 8, (Spring 1950), 10-11. See also McFadden's, "A note on contemporary Ulster writing", *Northman*, 14, 2, (1946), 20-25. "Conversation in a Shaving-Mirror", *Poetry Ireland*, 15, (October 1951), 9-12. "The course of Irish verse. Robert Farren", *Life and Letters*, 61, 140, (April 1949), 86-92.

⁷⁴ R. McFadden, "No dusty pioneer", G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet's Place*, (1991), 176.

⁷⁵ J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 17.

⁷⁶ R. McFadden, "Collected Poems 1932-67 by John Hewitt", TMs, McFadden's Scrapbook Collection, 1969-1990.

Post-Partition, the term 'Ulster' was widely assumed to be "synonymous with Northern Ireland"; Hewitt's diverse uses of it may simply reflect local shorthand. In a government pamphlet published in 1946, *Northern Ireland : Its History, Resources and People*, Hugh Shearman comments:

The name Ulster is regularly used as an alternative for Northern Ireland. According to the frontier laid down by English officials in Elizabethan times, it was taken as including the present six counties of Northern Ireland, together with three counties which now form part of Eire; but this provincial unit of the old Ulster has not had any practical administrative or political reality for some centuries, and the name Ulster may be regarded to-day as having become synonymous with Northern Ireland. (4)

Notably, in the same context Hewitt's 'Freehold' (1939-46) declared, "Mine is historic Ulster". On close reading of the poem, "historic Ulster" emerges as "battlefield / of Gael and Planter, certified and sealed / by blood", and a claim is staked on a "birthright" measured by "Three hundred years" tenure "which I must defend": presumably that is, from the 'native Irish'. In his contemporary essay, Hewitt explained:

The native Irish were not coralled [*sic*] like the Red Indians or exterminated like the Tasmanians. They persisted, clung to their nationality and faith, but lost their language, and with it the noble bardic tradition of meticulous prosody and magnificent legendry....

...This Irish population has given its loyalties to other political ideals than those held by the Protestant majority, has apparently forgotten that Ulster, even the Irish-Ulster, has its legacy of difference and individuality since the horned cairns were built and Hugh O'Neill hurled the flimsy clans against the imperial canon of Elisabeth.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ J. Hewitt, "The bitter gourd" (1945), T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 119-120.

Together with evidence that Hewitt asserted the demise of “Christian-Gaelic” culture in the “northern kingdom” in 1951 in “Painting and sculpture in Ulster”, the evidence of these remarks, ‘Freehold’, and Hewitt’s claim to “the historical province of Ulster” in his interview with Niall Kiely in 1977, indicates that Michael Longley’s reappraisal of his regionalism in 1993 as an attempt to “focus[ing] our attention on Ulster’s indigenous cultural resources” is as idealistic an interpretation of Hewitt’s vision as Brown’s focus on his missionary impulse in “John Hewitt : an Ulster poet” was twenty years earlier.⁷⁸ Indeed, it is curious to observe Hewitt, to whom contemporary criticism regularly attributes the introduction of radical new ways of ‘looking at the north’, closely and consistently espousing the official definitions of territory promulgated by, for example, the government apologist Shearman. Notably, Hewitt’s contemporary, John Boyd, recalled that he had objected to BBC Northern Ireland’s “widespread usage” of the word ‘Ulster’ which he denounced as:

A piece of linguistic sleight of hand that the Catholic minority found offensive ... Because Ireland had been divided into two parts ... the BBC governors in London seemed to imagine that Irish literature could

⁷⁸ J. Hewitt quoted in N. Kiely, “John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock”, *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6. M. Longley, “Back to the future”, *Index on Censorship*, 22, 8 & 9, (1993), 28.

suddenly be sliced up like ham to suit the political needs and appetites of the time ... It was one of the cultural effects of partition.⁷⁹

Hewitt's claim to a 'birthright' measured in "three hundred years" in 'Freehold' (1939-46) is equally revealing beside W. R. Rodgers' appraisal of the 'Ulsterman's' liking for "progress" in *The Ulstermen And Their Country* (1947). Rodgers explains that, "this is partly because there is in him a strain of the colonist who came to this corner of Ireland only three centuries ago and so his traditions are still in the making: he is restless for the future, and not arrested by the past". (3) Similarly, in 1949-50 Hewitt's 'The colony' claimed ownership through rights of tenure "drawn from the soil and sky" and, notably deflating the liberating potential of its Jungian experimental impulse, declared:

I could invent a legend of those trees,
and how their creatures, dryads, hamadryads,
fled from the copses, hid in thorny bushes,
and grew a crooked and malignant folk,
plotting and waiting for a bitter revenge
on their despoilers. So our troubled thought
is from enchantments of the old tree magic,
but I am not a sick and haunted man ...

⁷⁹ J. Boyd, *The Middle of My Journey*, (1990), 56. For a commentary on 'choices of national identity' in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1994, see, K. Trew, "Complementary or conflicting identities?", *Psychologist*, (October 1996). Trew writes, "Ulster refers to the Province of Ulster and it has been said to imply identification with Northern Ireland as a political region and an acceptance of its legitimacy". (461)

Loughlin's analysis of Rodgers' standpoint reinforces its correspondence to Hewitt's thinking:

Unlike traditional Unionist mythology, which located the defining experience of the Protestant community in the Ulster plantation of the early 17thc Rodgers sought to establish an authenticity of identity based on age-old historical residence. In this context, the Ulster 'personality' that developed was one that could not be reduced to the planter's mentality of early modern history ... Rodgers's accounts of community differences in the North have their source in the racial arguments used by Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

As is the case with Rodgers, the scope of Hewitt's regionalist ideas is limited to British historical mythologies. Moreover, Hewitt's rhetoric on extinct "Christian-Gaelic kingdoms" and "writing in English [from] about 1700", his self-profile as an "Ulsterman of Planter stock", and his experimental foray into the mind set of the "legions, then the colonists," in 'The colony' are notably consistent with Loughlin's paradigm of "traditional Unionist mythology". Following on this, in "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947) Hewitt wrote:

Ulster, considered as a region and not as the symbol of any particular creed, can, I believe, command the loyalty of every one of its inhabitants. For regional identity does not preclude, rather it requires, membership of a larger association. And, whether that association be, as I hope, of a federated British Isles, or a federal Ireland, out of that loyalty to our own place, rooted in honest history, in familiar folkways and knowledge, phrased in our own dialect, there should emerge a culture and an attitude individual and distinctive.

⁸⁰ J. Loughlin, "Ulster, Labour and national identity 1945-51", *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity Since 1885*, (1995), 143.

While in 1947 Hewitt appeared to allow room for a “federal Ireland”, he clearly preferred a federated “British Isles”; as Ó Seaghdha has remarked, in that context Hewitt would have been well aware “there was not the remotest prospect of the [former] possibility being realised”.⁸¹ Together, Hewitt’s mono-cultural strictures for ‘Ulster’ literature, and the exclusive kinship loyalties adverted to in his phrase, “our own dialect”, reduce his “honest history” to a mutable feast. At best, they declare with Patrick Kavanagh’s “Man”, who observed of the contemporary faction fights in, ‘Things nobody dies for’ (1947): “Neutral, Dick, but neutral on our side”.⁸²

By 1957, Hewitt had refined his personal hierarchy of regional loyalties; these were to “Ulster, to Ireland, to the British Isles, to Europe”.⁸³ Contemporary ‘cultural critics’ have re-evaluated this hierarchy as an integral part of his radical regionalism. Investigated in context, however, like the similarity between Hewitt’s and J. N. Browne’s comments on the status of regional literature, and the parallels between Hewitt’s and Rodgers’ references to colonists’ “three centuries” tenure, there is evidence that Hewitt merely articulates popular rhetoric. Specifically,

⁸¹ B. Ó. Seaghdha, “Ulster regionalism : the unpleasant facts”, *Irish Review*, 8, (1990), 56.

⁸² P. Kavanagh, *Complete Poems*, (1992 (1972)), 189-190.

⁸³ J. Hewitt quoted in M. Wallace, “A poet and his past”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.1957.

Hewitt's syntax notably echoes that of Boyd's in "Ulster prose", an essay which he published six years earlier in the officially sponsored *The Arts in Ulster* (1951):

Ulster is part of Ireland, which is part of the British Isles, which is part of Europe. Our literature should belong to our own country, to the British Isles, to Europe. It is important if it has a European importance, if it is a contribution to Western culture. (99)

Greacen's 'On the sense of isolation on war-time Ireland' both encapsulates Boyd's and Hewitt's European vision and highlights the impact of war and its detrimental influence on existing views of 'Irishness' in local notions of identity: "So now in days of fevered fret and stress / Let Europe measure out our Irishness!"⁸⁴

As Jonathan Bardon has observed, the period between 1945 and 1963 were "The Quiet Years" in Northern Ireland, while "the prospect of Irish reunification never seemed so distant as it did in 1951".⁸⁵ Notably, however, in circles other than Hewitt's discontent with this 'quietude' rumbled beneath the surface. Addressing PEN Delegates in 1953, Alderman J. Beattie, MP, and Councillors J. MacGougan, Cronan Hughes, Mary O'Malley and Seamus McAlister of the Belfast Corporation declared:

⁸⁴ R. Greacen, *Collected Poems 1944-1994*, (1995), 69.

⁸⁵ J. Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, (1992), 603.

For thirty years strenuous efforts have been made to establish a political and social entity, known officially as Northern Ireland and unofficially as Ulster (though it includes only six of the nine counties of that province). In recent years certain writers have made efforts to establish a similar cultural entity....

So the local writer has to make up his mind about his roots. Those who decide that their background is Irish, with local variations, have made a clear-cut decision. But the Unionist writer, or the writer who has his eye on a local market can make no such simple decision ... It is not a question of a regionalist writer who is clear about the larger background. The Unionist writer ignores or plays down the larger background of Ireland ... Some have tried an ingenious compromise of three loyalties, 'Ulster', Ireland and Britain. Others have not even gone so far as to evolve a theoretical basis for their attitude. In most cases they have taken refuge in a spurious regionalism. So far as their work is concerned this has meant that the plays, poems or novels ... show clear the strain under which they have been produced....

...The dilemma of the 'Ulster' writer will remain as long as the political and economic situation from which it springs endures. When that situation changes the dilemma will be resolved, until then the 'Ulster' writer will continue to cultivate his garden and produce only a crop of literary weeds.⁸⁶

A comparison between Hewitt's thinking and this incisive critique of the 'local scene' indicates that, however his hierarchical loyalties and personal mythology are assessed in the modern context, in the 1940s and 1950s they were not unique, neither did they signify revolutionary zeal. Moreover, Hewitt's gesture towards a "federal Ireland" in "Regionalism : the last chance" must be juxtaposed with his tendency to co-opt Ireland into 'the British Isles'. His hierarchy of identities is absolutely consistent with his

⁸⁶ M. M. J. Beattie C. Hughes, M. O'Malley and S. McAlister, "To PEN Delegates", TD. *The Translation of Dialect*. International PEN Conference, 11.06.1953. Carnduff Papers : In Private Hands.

asserting in three separate interviews a preference for “some sort of federation of the British Isles, involving dual citizenship”, that “Ireland is part of the British Isles”, and his “dream for a federation of the British Isles, which would include the parts of Scotland, the north of England, Wales, the south of England, and the parts of Ireland. We all belong together, all inhabit the same archipelago”.⁸⁷ Evidence of Hewitt’s observably ‘British solutions’ to Ulster’s disputed borders provide an ironic counterpart for Ó Seaghdha’s remark that he avoided obvious difficulties.

Hewitt’s removal to Coventry signalled a watershed in his career; as he stated in Foreward to *Collected Poems* (1968), “a break in this and in much else occurred when I settled in the English Midlands in the spring of 1957”. Despite being encouraged by this circumstance to direct his thinking beyond local issues, the trail of Hewitt’s thinking took him full circle from the “historic Ulster” of ‘Freehold’ to 1977 when, re-ensconced in the ‘province’, he again claimed it as his patrimony. Interviewed by Kiely he insisted, “my Ulster takes in Donegal, my Ulster is the historical province of Ulster”. Hewitt explained:

I’ve been to Donegal and I think the people there are like me ...

...Your Ulster Unionist omits the fact that he was born on the island of Ireland - and that buggers him. Your Northern Nationalist doesn’t realise that he belongs to Ulster first, that buggers him. Your extreme

⁸⁷ Hewitt quoted in S. McAughtry, “Trying to make sense of the North”, *Irish Times*, 25.07.1983, 10. K. Levine, “A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent”, *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16. D. Smyth, “So much older then...younger than that now”, *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 14.

Irish Republican won't recognise Britain - it's stupid ... you're wrong if you don't recognise each of those states of loyalties.⁸⁸

Hewitt's remarks echo Samuel Ferguson's nostalgia for a revitalised union between Great Britain and Ireland a century earlier. Arguably, Ferguson had more reason to be optimistic in achieving his goal. As noted above, Hewitt regularly annexed Ireland (the twenty-six county Republic) to the British Isles; here he fails even to concede its maturity, its 'ownership' of three counties of his 'historic Ulster', most notably Donegal. Curiously, there is evidence that on this point Hewitt is consistent. In 1945 in "The bitter gourd" Hewitt remarked:

The fact that many men of Ulster Protestant stock have espoused and often led movements for Irish nationalist ideals demonstrates that political theories and concepts of that kind are not the prerogative of those of Gaelic race or that such ideas and their opposites ... have anything fundamental to do with the character, quality or nature of Ulster.

Hewitt's remarks implicitly question Longley's attempts to attribute to him the "Ulster Protestant writer's tendency to use 1798 rather than 1916 as a radical benchmark", with drawing inspiration from the "Northern and proto-socialist" rebellion.⁸⁹ Indeed, when asked by Kiely to concede that

⁸⁸ J. Hewitt quoted in N. Kiely, "John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock", *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6.

⁸⁹ In "Progressive Bookmen", E. Longley defines this "radical benchmark" as "one which may define difference from, rather than solidarity with, the Southern state". Naming Hewitt's "favourite United Irishmen as James Hope, the weaver of Templepatrick ... [and] ... William Thompson ... 'the brave old pre-Marx Marxists of

“Ireland has a stronger case to make for separation from Britain, both for historical and geographical reasons”, Hewitt replied somewhat bewilderingly, “No, the Scots were a nation long before the Irish were. Ireland only became a nation about the time of Thomas Davis. It was the invention of intellectuals”.⁹⁰

In 1977, Hewitt’s thinking is surprisingly coterminous with the ideological thrust of an official Ulster Young Unionist Council document published in 1995, *Ulster, The Lost Culture*:

Irish Republicanism has used “culture” as one of its weapons in the battle for supremacy on the island of Ireland since the latter half of the 19th Century ... The nationalists have, through deceptions and myths, propagated the idea of a 32-county Irish nation.⁹¹

Following on this, it is vital to analyse Hewitt’s reference to the ‘Scots nation’ in context, and to bear in mind his tendency to gravitate towards fashionable theories. It might be argued, for example, that in 1977 Hewitt’s remarks reflect the influence of contemporary interest among ‘loyalist’ paramilitary spokespersons to counter ‘nationalist propaganda’ with a

Ireland’ ... [and] ... Mary Ann McCracken”, she insisted that Hewitt and S. H. Bell “dwell on the Northern and proto-socialist ‘98” rebellion. See *The Living Stream* (1994), 114.

⁹⁰ J. Hewitt quoted in N. Kiely, “John Hewitt : Northern poet of planter stock”, *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6. Speaking in “Davis, Mangan, Ferguson”, BBC Radio Ulster, 19.10.1974, John Hewitt claimed that Davis was the “inventor of Irish nationalism as a political ideal”.

⁹¹ D. Hume, “Ulster: the lost culture”, I. Adamson, D. Hume and D. McDowell, eds., *Cuchulain, The Lost Legend : Ulster, The Lost Culture*, (1995), 15, 18.

“specifically Protestant version” of history that might bind it exclusively to that of the British Isles.⁹² The booklet, *Ulster, The Lost Culture*, reflects thirty years’ cumulative attempts by Unionists to develop an authenticating mythology.⁹³ In “Cultural traditions : a double-edged sword?” Steve Bruce expands on ‘loyalist’ thinking in the 1970s:

Far from being the original occupants, the Gaels were [portrayed as] invaders who displaced the original inhabitants of Ulster - the Cruithin ... Thus the Scottish settlers who colonised the north east of Ireland were not oppressive ‘planters’ but the original owners returning to their rightful habitation.⁹⁴

Bruce’s analysis of ‘loyalists’ attempts to challenge ascendant, pan-nationalist mythologies after the Troubles re-emerged in 1968, through

⁹² In 1974 Hewitt expressed ‘socialist’ sympathy with the Ulster Workers’ Strike organised by the ‘loyalist’ Ulster Defence Association: “it was magnificently run and I would love to know who was the leader who ran it ... Anderstown and its people had their barbecues, and there were buses going up the Falls, they weren’t suffering as much as other more working-class communities in Belfast”. See Hewitt quoted in E. Boland, “The clash of identities - 1”, *Irish Times*, 04.07.1974, 14.

⁹³ I. Adamson is a central figure in researching these ‘histories’. See I. Adamson, D. Hume and D. McDowell, eds., *Cuchulain, The Lost Legend : Ulster, The Lost Culture*, (1995). Adamson has produced books and pamphlets on ‘Ulster history’ since the late 1960s, for example, *Bangor, Light of the World* and *The Cruithin*. From the early 1970s, interest in ‘Ulster’ myths gained momentum in ‘loyalist’ working-class culture; they proved particularly attractive to paramilitary groups seeking to promulgate alternative mythologies of Ulster’s ‘original’ peoples and counter what they viewed as an exclusivist, nationalist ‘propaganda’. See Preface to Adamson, *The Ulster People*, (1991). See also A. Buckley, “‘We’re Trying to Find our Identity’ : uses of history among Ulster Protestants”, and E. Tonkin, M. McDonald and M. Chapman, eds., *History and Ethnicity*, (1989), 183-197.

⁹⁴ S. Bruce, “Cultural traditions : a double-edged sword?”, *Causeway*, (Autumn 1994), 24.

stressing historical exchanges of peoples between Ireland and Scotland is interesting beside Hewitt's portrait of "We Irish" in 'Ireland' (1968):

We Irish pride ourselves as patriots

But we are fools, I say, are ignorant fools
 to waste the spirit's warmth in this cold air,
 to spend our wit and love and poetry
 on half a dozen peat and a black bog.

We are not native here or anywhere.
 We were the Keltic wave that broke over Europe,
 and ran up this bleak beach among these stones:
 but when the tide ebbed, were left stranded here

So we are bitter, and are dying out
 in terrible harshness in this lonely place,
 and what we think is love for usual rock
 or old affection for our customary ledge,
 is but forgotten longing for the sea
 that cries far out and calls us to partake
 in his great tidal movements round the earth.

In 1983, Hewitt again included the "parts of Ireland" within his preferred federation when, speaking to Sam McAughtry, he offered an observably 'British solution' to 'Ulster's' border dispute:

I would not advise the Protestants to become part of a state that writes the laws of one church into its constitution. I would not myself become the citizen of a state that makes literary censorship legal. I would like to see some sort of federation of the British Isles, involving dual citizenship.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ J. Hewitt quoted in S. McAughtry, "Trying to make sense of the North", *Irish Times*, 25.07.1983, 10.

The evidence of these comments suggests that Longley's defence of Hewitt's "distaste for the Republican-socialist axis" in "Progressive Bookmen" is justified. Longley depicts Hewitt as a cultural missionary who was uniquely able to sustain a precarious balance between "atheism or secularism and anti-Catholicism in opposition to oppressive southern censorship".⁹⁶ Conversely, the evidence of Hewitt's remarks to Levine in 1985 undermines Longley's attempt to re-evaluate his implacable resistance to an "all-Ireland socialist edifice" during his regionalist phase as secular suspicion of tribal oppositions embedded in nationalist and unionist politics. Addressing Levine, Hewitt reiterated his familiar template of loyalties, cautioned against omissions and added: "my most popular poem, 'An Irishman in Coventry' (1958) gives my stance a more Irish nature than is actually accurate. I'm a bit more of a separatist". Hewitt admitted that his concept of region had been "all wrong", that he had been trying "trying to bring together incompatible pieces". Typically inconsistent, Hewitt again incorporated Ireland within the British Isles:

I couldn't ... happily belong to a Gaelic-speaking Irish republic, because that's not my native tongue, and I don't want to separate it from Britain because the complete body, the corpus of my thought, has come from Britain ... The Irish people, before my ancestors came here, were a tribe of cattle-rustlers, fighting each other and burning churches and what not.

⁹⁶ E. Longley, *The Living Stream* (1994), 115.

They wrote very nice songs and some good poetry. I'd like to include them too in the general picture, but they're not the whole of the story.⁹⁷

The evidence of these remarks runs counter to Greacen's view that Hewitt's central theme ceaselessly addressed the "question of how those of Planter stock can relate to the Gaelic past and present".⁹⁸ In Hewitt's defence, in 1985 he was almost eighty years old. Nevertheless, the Levine interview is evidence that he could be curiously unreflective in unguarded moments, and his frequent resort to an arid 'hierarchy of values' suggests an inflexible intellect; in particular, it characterises the many paradoxes lurking in the imaginative possibilities of Hewitt's regionalism that confound its advocacy as a "cross-sectarian ideal". Hewitt's comments to McAughtry in 1983 are valid in so far as they relate to the writer's fate in an Ireland waggishly derided as the "world's greatest connoisseur of indecency and obscenity".⁹⁹ However, the Levine interview is more difficult to explain. Contrary to Johnstone's note, it cannot be glossed as "naïvely patronising".¹⁰⁰ Addressing a viciously sectarian context, the views

⁹⁷J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

⁹⁸R. Greacen, "John Hewitt : a personal tribute", *Ulster Tatler*, 08.11.1983, 74.

⁹⁹P. Lennon, "Ireland's bare necessities", *Guardian*, 03.10.1995, 16. Lennon comments that the "50s saw the apotheosis of Irish book and magazine censorship", that in the "early 60s book banning was still energetic", but that thereafter a more liberal ethos gradually gained momentum. Beside this evidence, Hewitt appears over-eager to emphasise largely outdated, or at least, receding concerns.

¹⁰⁰R. Johnstone, "Listening for the landward bells", *Belfast Telegraph*, 25.01.1992.

expressed are at best insensitive, at worst a tellingly lucid example of, in Longley's phrase, "political fixity shutting off imaginative possibility".¹⁰¹ They are impossible to reconcile with Martin Mooney's submission that Hewitt's "abiding concern" is with "language, how it unites or alienates, how it oppresses and how it can set free".¹⁰² They do, however, ironically complement Eavan Boland's appreciation of Hewitt as "one of the most original elegists of Irish division".¹⁰³

Hewitt's 'Freehold' (1939-46) claims "historic Ulster" by right of tenure. Hewitt takes most of his regionalist ideas from Lewis Mumford's *Culture of Cities* (1940). Unlike Howard Sergeant's awareness of the need to address the "complexities of existing conditions" in 1953, Hewitt fatally neglects Mumford's insistence that regionalism requires, indeed demands, reinvestigation of "fundamental questions of human inter-relationship across ... ethnic, ideological and cultural boundaries"; avoids too Mumford's warning that chaos follows where political, economic and cultural realities are disregarded.¹⁰⁴ Mumford explains, "too hastily we have

¹⁰¹ In *Poetry in the Wars*, (1986), 199, E. Longley commented that the Field Day project "enacted a process whereby political fixity shuts off imaginative possibility, the ideological tail wags the creative dog".

¹⁰² M. Mooney, "A native mode : language and regionalism in the poetry of John Hewitt", *Irish Review*, 3, (1988), 67.

¹⁰³ E. Boland, "John Hewitt : an appreciation", *Irish Times*, 30.06.1987, 8.

¹⁰⁴ L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (1940 (1938)), 348.

attempted to achieve a more beneficent alignment in culture, while retaining those power states whose existence perpetuates the habits of territorial conquest and class exploitation". (353) In "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947) Hewitt writes, "regionalism ... begins with a revival of poetry and language: it ends with plans for economic invigoration of regional agriculture and industry, with proposals for more autonomous political life, with an effort to build up local centres of learning and culture".¹⁰⁵ Charging the "government" with the "major responsibility", Hewitt alters Mumford's emphasis on the need to tackle practical realities and advances the converse premise that, "link[ing] the two most important aspects of the general tendency, that represented by the creative artists, and that represented by ... the planners ... awakened popular consciousness", *ergo* a sense of regional identity:

The Government of Northern Ireland persists in the failure so trenchantly analysed by Professor Stanford in his remarkable pamphlet *Faith and Faction in Ireland Now*, wherein he asserts that 'in Ireland a political creed needs cultural and historical roots if it is to win and hold the imagination of the people', and again, 'If the Unionists would succeed they must breed more children and many poets'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Hewitt attributes this outline to a "French observer", but he appears to have taken it from L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (1940 (1938)), 359.

¹⁰⁶ J. Hewitt, "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947), T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 125.

The evidence of “Regionalism : the last chance” subverts Brown’s and Kirkland’s stress on Hewitt’s instinct toward “‘natural’, organic allegiance[s]”. Crucially, examined in context, Hewitt’s remarks are compatible with a contemporary “growth of authoritarian politics” which is reflected in Herbert Read’s remarks on emergent “attempts to replace the rule of an ignorant majority by the rule of an intelligent élite”.¹⁰⁷ While Mumford too conceived the “re-animation and re-building of regions” as the “grand task of politics”,¹⁰⁸ Hewitt overturned Mumford’s asserting the need for a “dynamic emotional surge” as a prerequisite to confronting “fundamental questions of human inter-relationships”. Instead, Hewitt contended that *culture*, in the hands of “alert people”, could create a “stirring in the dry bones”, undermine “material ideals of success”, and transform individuals from “hands in a machine shop” into the backbone of “small groups and little regions”.¹⁰⁹

Hewitt’s selective use of Mumford characterises his expedient approach to radical theory, his tendency to be inconsistent and his disinclination, inability perhaps, to ‘follow through’. These aspects of Hewitt are further exposed when the progress of his several flirtations with regionalism is

¹⁰⁷ H. Read, *Anarchy & Order*, (1974), 15.

¹⁰⁸ L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (1940 (1938)), 348.

¹⁰⁹ J. Hewitt, “Regionalism : the last chance”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 123, and “Programme for poetry”, *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2, 10, (1948), 16.

charted and interpreted in context. In 1947 in “Regionalism : the last chance”, Hewitt advocated that regionalism demanded a marriage between planners - or government - and artists to generate cultural revival and synthesis. Between 1949 and 1950, Hewitt conjured with an “intellectual and Clare type of vision”, studied the healing power of dreams and retreated into a Jungian analysis of the ‘planter’ condition in ‘The colony’.¹¹⁰ Significantly, in “Winter 1950-1951”, Hewitt emerged from this poetic experiment to espouse a significantly one-dimensional framework for the ‘Ulster’ character, and casually disregard that marginalised section of ‘Ulster’ literature, writing in Irish.¹¹¹ In 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain, Hewitt reverted to Mumford, appropriating his hypothesis, “as life becomes insurgent once more in our civilization, conquering the reckless thrust of barbarism, the culture of cities will be both instrument and goal”.¹¹² Hewitt’s debt to Mumford is clear in his parallel vision of “merchants and artisans freed from the burden of feudal duties”, gathering in cities transformed by “social and economic factors” into “oases of security and progress in a sea of brigandage and conservatism”.¹¹³ Also in 1951, Hewitt asserted the pre-eminence and, simultaneously, the demise of

¹¹⁰ J. Hewitt, “Poetry and Ulster : a survey”, *Poetry Ireland*, 8, (January 1950), 10.

¹¹¹ J. Hewitt, “Winter 1950-1951”, *Rann*, 11, (Winter 1950-51), 1-2.

¹¹² L. Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (1940 (1938)), 12.

¹¹³ J. Hewitt, “Painting and sculpture in Ulster”, S. H. Bell, ed., *The Arts in Ulster*, (1951), 72.

Ireland's "distinct culture" and "Christian-Gaelic" fiefdoms.¹¹⁴ Evidence of Hewitt's contrary perspectives and susceptibility to current theories suggests that, despite his exclusive parameters for regional literature, Johnstone's remark that he "retained a romantic tinge" is marginally more tenable than Dawe's and Longley's emphasis on his practical regionalism.¹¹⁵

By 1953, Hewitt appeared to have exhausted fresh sources of referents and, more or less, discarded Jungian psychoanalysis. Accordingly, in "The course of writing in Ulster" (1953) he quixotically identified County Londonderry born polemicist John Mitchel's *Life of Hugh O'Neill* (1845) as symbolising the defining moment when, "the colonial phase was over" and the 'Ulsterman' no longer obliged to consider himself "merely as a settler". Contradicting his earlier comment in 1950 in "Poetry and Ulster : a survey" that "there can be no such thing as Ulster poetry ... we simply have poets of Ulster birth", in 1953 Hewitt insisted that, from the turn of the century, "it was as native to this island that the Ulster poets enlisted in the [regionalist] movement". Beside evidence of Hewitt's dismissiveness towards Gaelic culture, the signifier, "native", is rewardingly deconstructed by the evidence of his letter to a Miss Craig in 1976. Responding to her proposal for a study of "Ulster Literature", Hewitt commended Craig's "critical sharpness" but

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*,

¹¹⁵ R. Johnstone, "Listening for the landward bells", *Belfast Telegraph*, 25.01.1992.

suggested it might “be better to consider the matter as the development of two colonial cultures or the decay and extinction of a native culture”.¹¹⁶ Beside this evidence, Dawe’s comment that the “radical dimension” of Hewitt’s regionalism reflected an understanding of ‘colony’ based more in “Greek root than Roman ... an independent city founded by emigrants” is inadvertently astute.¹¹⁷ Hewitt clearly at no time, as Kavanagh deduced of local regionalists in the 1940s, anticipated ‘taking a fall’. Specifically, in the 1940s and early 1950s, Hewitt’s attempts to establish terms for a representative ‘Ulster’ literature faltered on indeterminate regional boundaries and his exclusivist adherence to a British-orientated philosophical and language culture. This evidence further illumines McFadden’s vexed fear of regionalism’s potential to mask political intent, and undermines re-appraisals of Hewitt’s regionalism as a sort of embryonic ‘fifth province’.

M. Ó Tuathaigh notes that Hewitt’s poetry has not been interpreted in strictly literary terms, but rather for its “cultural witness and relevance to bitter community divisions in Northern Ireland”.¹¹⁸ John Montague’s essay, “Regionalism into reconciliation” (1964) is central to Hewitt’s

¹¹⁶ J. Hewitt to Miss Craig, TLS, 17.04.1976. Public Record Office Northern Ireland.

¹¹⁷ G. Dawe, “Against piety : a reading of John Hewitt’s poetry”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 214.

¹¹⁸ M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, “A limited regionalism”, M. Crozier, ed., *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland, Varieties of Britishness*, (1990), 170.

transformation to cultural icon. Specifically, its title is a birth-metaphor for the politicization of 'Ulster regionalism'. Montague observed:

Whereas previously Hewitt had been concerned with asserting the planter's identification with the landscape and ... proclaiming an Ulster Regionalism, [in the 1950s] he begins to suggest the necessity of Planter and Gael coming to terms....

.....
[After his move to Coventry] we are admitted to the struggle of a stubborn, resolutely honest mind with itself: the mind of the first (and probably the last) deliberately Ulster, Protestant poet.¹¹⁹

After "Regionalism into reconciliation" (1964) was published, Hewitt wrote to Montague outlining his efforts to "waken folk to the concept of region".

Hewitt recalled that his regionalism was:

A necessary step to prize Ulster loose from the British anchorage: then and only then, when free in ideology, the unity with the other part of our island could be realised and established. The North cannot be invaded, and taken by the Republic: if simply outvoted by a nationalist majority resentment would remain, but, realising themselves for what they are for the first time, not Britain's pensioners or stranded Englishmen and Scots, being instead a group living long enough in Ireland to have the air in their blood, the landscape in their bones, and the history in their hearts and so, a special kind of Irish themselves, they could with grace make the transition into federal unity.¹²⁰

Hewitt's conception of a "special" Irish identity is remarkably akin to Deane's view of the Protestant Irish. Like Montague, Deane espouses a

¹¹⁹ J. Montague, "Regionalism into reconciliation", *Poetry Ireland*, 3, (Spring 1964), 116, 118.

¹²⁰ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC.

traditional nationalist perspective, that imposing a thirty-two county Irish Republic could resolve identity problems widely perceived as intrinsic to Northern Irish Protestants:

Colonists are always condemned to mimic what the mother country has learned to forget ... Irishness will be the result of unity, not the precondition of it ... Irishness is a quality many believe a Protestant incapable of possessing ... and in a true sense he won't possess it, until his having it becomes an accepted fact.¹²¹

However, Hewitt's romantic reconstruction of his regionalism must be juxtaposed with his tendency to be audience-driven. Addressing Montague, a Catholic and a nationalist who writes, Welch notes, "as a spokesman for his people the Ulster Catholics",¹²² Hewitt commends his regionalism as advocating a radical, practical first step towards political and ideological independence from Britain and "unity with the other part of our island". Unlike the 1940s, when Hewitt elaborated an inflexible outline for a monoglot local literature particularised within indeterminate regional boundaries, in 1964 he reinvents his regionalism as a means to facilitate a "special kind of Irish" identity. This cultural metamorphosis would emerge from a defining moment of realisation, be carried forward by "grace" and

¹²¹ S. Deane, "Mugwumps and reptiles", *Atlantis*, 2, (October 1970), 3-10, passim.

¹²² R. Welch, ed., *Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, (1996), 371.

culminate in a sensuous melding with the Irish “landscape” and its “history”.

The contrariety between Hewitt’s claims for his regionalism in the 1940s and in 1964 render it prudent to further explore the revised version in context. In 1964, Hewitt’s ‘radical regionalism’ needs to be considered in concert with his acute sense of ‘exile’; this was agitated by the bitter sense of grievance he nursed for decades towards the Unionist controlled Belfast City Council. Notably, in his letter to Montague, Hewitt confessed: “I have become, I believe, more objective regarding my native province and my native country ... my apparent harshness may have been partly conditioned by the sense of rejection ‘by my own’”. Further, ‘An Irishman in Coventry’, written just a year after Hewitt moved to Coventry in July 1958, is evidence that this event produced in him an effusion of émigré idealism; the poem records the exile’s bitter-sweet yearning for home: “Yet like Lir’s children banished to the waters / our hearts still listen for the landward bells.” The following November, Hewitt wrote in the *Belfast Telegraph*:

In the heart of the English midlands looking back from the fulcrum of middle age on my personal adventures among those books which were a significant part of my Irish past, I sometimes wonder if time and distance have given me a perspective and objectivity or if sentiment and the ordinary wear and tear of memory may not have distorted details and proportion.¹²³

¹²³ J. Hewitt, “Journey of discovery into the literature of Ulster”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 24.11.1958, 9.

This evidence suggests that the regional model relayed to Montague in 1964 reflected a momentary, radical political impulse recollected in the tranquillity of 'exile'. It might, therefore, be argued that, neglected in Coventry and flattered by the sobriquet Montague bestowed on him, Hewitt was drawn to imagine himself as vanguard for a last generation of "deliberately Ulster Protestants". Whether this is so, Hewitt's sharpened polemic in 1964 is inconsistent with both his 'fashionable' Anglocentricism in the 1940s and early 1950s, and with his British-orientated federalism of the 1970s and 1980s. Longley's note that Hewitt "rephrased [Northern Ireland's] political impasse" is, therefore, ironically astute.¹²⁴

Disappointingly, Montague's essay did not generate the attention Hewitt craved. By contrast, following his performance as 'Planter' to Montague's 'Gael' on the reading tour, *The Planter and the Gael* (1970), Hewitt was fêted as cultural exemplar for Protestant 'Ulster'. Notably, one year later in 1971 in Foreword to *An Ulster Reckoning* Hewitt directed readers to Montague's essay, "Regionalism into reconciliation": "in an article in *Poetry Ireland* seven years ago, John Montague described me as 'the first (and probably the last) deliberately Ulster Protestant poet'. That designation carries a heavy obligation these days". Exploiting the contemporary mood, the tenor of Hewitt's remarks is inconsistent with the

¹²⁴E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 125.

radical verve that is implicit in his private letter to Montague, and with his bravura announcement in 1953 in "Planter's gothic" that "spiritually" he was his "own man, the ultimate Protestant". Besides illustrating his tendency to dissemble, the disparity between Hewitt's claim in Foreword to *An Ulster Reckoning* to be a representative Protestant, seriously mindful of his 'obligations', and his traducing the book as "politic rhetoric" nine years later in 1980,¹²⁵ questions whether it is appropriate to use him as a model of wisdom for, in Montague's phrase, "a land of fanatics".¹²⁶

As is the case with Hewitt's changing opinions, critical approaches to him are invariably compromised by lack of attention to "details and proportion". Introducing *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991), Ormsby downplays the 'crypto-unionism' of Hewitt's published essays on regionalism. Instead he provides a frame for Hewitt's private voice:

It was part of Hewitt's vision that regional loyalties might transcend sectarian division in Northern Ireland and that the Protestant majority in the north would come to realise themselves 'for the first time, not Britain's pensioners or stranded Englishmen and Scots, being instead a group living long enough in Ireland to have the air in their blood, the landscape in their bones, and the history in their hearts, and so a special kind of Irish themselves, they could with grace make the transition to federal unity' (draft of a letter to John Montague, Spring 1964) with the Republic of Ireland, as well as with the other main regions of the British Isles.

¹²⁵ J. Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael : interview with John Hewitt and John Montague", *Cranebag Book of Irish Studies*, (The Northern Issue), (1980), 724.

¹²⁶ J. Montague, "Spiritual maverick", *Threshold* 38, (Winter 1986-87), 18.

Ormsby asserts the primacy of the 'Republic of Ireland' in Hewitt's hierarchy. Like Michael Longley's remark in 1993 that Hewitt, "did not seem too bothered as to whether that association might be a federated British Isles or a federal Ireland", Ormsby's emphasis is misleading.¹²⁷ The phrase, "with the Republic of Ireland, as well as with the other main regions of the British Isles" is Ormsby's. Hewitt was not so explicit, and it is vital to recall his inflexible loyalties and his tendency to incorporate Ireland within a British federation. In the original of his letter to Montague, Hewitt follows his oblique reference to, "transition to federal unity", with a new paragraph which begins: "I always maintained that our loyalties had an order to Ulster, to Ireland, to the British Archipelago, to Europe; and that anyone who skipped a step or missed a link falsified the total". Hewitt's restatement of his familiar hierarchy of loyalties illumines Ormsby's excising the phrases, "prizing Ulster loose from the British anchorage" and "unity with the other part of our island", from the original quotation. Arguably, Ormsby was aware that Hewitt's private claims for his regionalism in his unpublished letter to Montague contradicted published versions, and that they had the potential to undermine the certainties implicit in his oft-stated, ritualised mantra of regional loyalties.¹²⁸ Specifically, in the Montague

¹²⁷ M. Longley, "Back to the future", *Index on Censorship*, 22, 8 & 9, (1993), 28.

¹²⁸ John Hewitt's letter to John Montague was among papers bequeathed to the University of Ulster at Coleraine; it gives a comprehensive outline of his literary credo. Ormsby appears to have had first sight of it when compiling *The Collected Poems of*

letter, Hewitt appears to indicate that his regionalism was a model for securing a predetermined political outcome. Arguably, therefore, it was a questionable paradigm for “transcend[ing] sectarian division”, since it runs counter to advocacies of Hewitt’s regionalism as having the potential to create a neutral, healing space. Longley’s analysis of Unionist attitudes to ‘culture’ in “Progressive Bookmen” offers a further insight into Ormsby’s discretion. Insisting that Hewitt’s “regionalism, even including its federal frontiers, was open and open-ended”, Longley warns: “affronted Nationalism should remember that Unionists themselves have always paranoically perceived Ulster local culture, Scots or Irish or both, as the Trojan horse for an Irish national culture”.¹²⁹ Clearly, ‘unionist paranoiacs’, at least as they are portrayed by Longley, would not embrace the blueprint for regionalism as it is outlined in Hewitt’s original letter to Montague along that “necessary step to prize Ulster loose from the British anchorage”. Accordingly, it might be deduced that Ormsby edited Hewitt’s comments to preserve his credibility as a Protestant icon.

The Montague letter is the only evidence that Hewitt espoused radical political goals. Coincident with his retirement to Belfast in 1972, Hewitt published “No rootless colonist” where he again revised his regionalism.

John Hewitt, (1991). Until an archivist was appointed in 1995, the letter not readily available.

¹²⁹ E. Longley, “Progressive Bookmen”, *Irish Review*, 1, (1986), 56.

Notably paralleling Brown's contemporary stress on writers' obligations in society in "John Hewitt : an Ulster poet" (1972), Hewitt recovered his conservative, 1940s regionalism from its momentary eclipse in the Montague letter, and reinvented it as a pre-emptive attempt to encourage mutuality and 'parity of esteem'. Hewitt recalled that in the 1940s he had seen in "the province of Ulster ... a meeting place for the two separated communities which dwelt within its limits, where the older and the less old peoples might discover a basis for amity and co-operative progress".¹³⁰ In 1972, Hewitt's phrase, "within its limits", symbolised a retreat into the 'cultural regionalism' currently exercising critical discourses. Examined in context, Hewitt's stress on cultural harmony in "No rootless colonist" is inextricably linked to his rising profile. Hewitt had, for example, completed a re run of *The Planter and the Gael* and taken part in the Dublin Arts Festival with Seamus Heaney. Accordingly, even allowing that Hewitt was an incorrigible romantic, Dawe's theory that he "understood poetry as a powerful compensation for the inadequacies and failures of the social reality which he had inherited and sought to transform" is simplistic.¹³¹ McFadden's remark that, "having failed to find gods in men", Hewitt preferred to "contemplate a haystack than to predict the ruin of the state" is

¹³⁰ J. Hewitt, "No rootless colonist", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 153.

¹³¹ G. Dawe, "Getting on with the job", *Linen Hall Review*, 5, 2, (1988), 27.

more astute.¹³² Specifically, when it is investigated in context, the progress of Hewitt's regionalist ideas mirrored rather than led politico-cultural trends. It might be argued, therefore, that he lacked the capacity to innovate, to engage with the complex emotional and racial dynamics underpinning, in Longley's phrase, "Green and Orange state-ideologies".¹³³

There is overwhelming evidence that Hewitt was fundamentally inconsistent, and politically conservative. Although by 1985 he had confessed to Levine that his concept of region had been "all wrong", some critics, especially Edna Longley, continue to interpret his regionalism as the means through which his political aims and energies in the 1940s were "*converted* rather than *diverted* ... into cultural channels which might accelerate a progressive flow".¹³⁴ [Longley's emphasis] Similarly, while conceding that Hewitt 'disrupted' Lewis Mumford's chronology, John Wilson Foster applauded his regionalism as "circumspect and realistic", a tribute to his radical integrity.¹³⁵ These critical meta-narratives labour to accommodate Hewitt's evasion of political realities and his inability to accommodate the

¹³² R. McFadden, "A note on contemporary Ulster writing", *Northman*, 14, 2, (1946), 22.

¹³³ In "Opening up : a new pluralism", R. Johnstone and R. Wilson, ed., *Troubled Times : Fortnight Magazine and the Troubles in Northern Ireland*, (1991) (1987)), 144, Edna Longley remarked that "cultural regionalism ... seems the only possible underpinning of the only rational political outcome - devolution, power-sharing ... Green and Orange state-ideologies ... are two failed conceptual entities on this island".

¹³⁴ E. Longley, *The Living Stream* (1994), 123.

¹³⁵ J. W. Foster, *Colonial Consequences*, (1991), 280.

centrality of Gaelic culture in Ulster's "traditional and historical identity". Further, a close reading of "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947) reveals that Hewitt dispensed with Mumford's stress on "emotion" because he believed 'Ulster' had achieved some "measure of political autonomy over twenty years", enjoyed "remarkable success in the economic invigoration of regional agriculture" and "several measures of enlightened statesmanship".¹³⁶ This emphasis is difficult to reconcile with the history of the political state of Northern Ireland. Aside from challenging the integrity of Hewitt's revised 'regionalisms' as outlined in the Montague letter and "No rootless colonist", it is hardly a basis for radical enterprise.

By scrutinising Hewitt's regionalism in the 1940s, it is possible to establish that his commitment to its potential then was limited by an exclusivist vision of 'Ulster' literature. Arguably, therefore, it is a dubious model for cultural harmony in the modern context. By investigating the substance of, and important inconsistencies between Hewitt's 'revised' regionalisms through exploring each version in the context of its delivery, it emerges that each was tailored to a critical stage in the politicization of

¹³⁶ J. Hewitt, "Regionalism : the last chance", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 124. Hewitt refers to the setting up of the Housing Trust and the Tuberculosis Authority. In 1946, H. Shearman also records "great progress ... in agricultural education in Ulster" and "great progress in social amenities". See Shearman's official pamphlet, *Northern Ireland : Its History, Resources and People*, (1946), 26. Notably, the inappropriate allocation of public housing became one of the catalytic issues that culminated in protest marches and the forming of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association between 1967-1968.

literary-critical dialogue in Northern Ireland. This evidence questions Hewitt's self-projection as a cultural missionary. Specifically, when juxtaposed with his emphatic stress on an institutionalised role for the artist in society, Hewitt's 'regionalisms' - in all their aspects - offer little more than an injunction to the "alert" to gaze at the philistines and wonder, "Can these bones live?".¹³⁷ Critical attempts to elevate him to superlative visionary are, therefore, inappropriate. Moreover, 'regionalism' is just one of several aspects of Hewitt to have been remythologised in a context that is distinguished by proliferating, negative views of 'Protestant' cultures and their literary legacies.

¹³⁷ Ezekiel 37:7

CHAPTER 5

JOHN HEWITT, A 'SPIRITUAL MAVERICK'?

In "A secular imagination" Terence Brown writes:

Hewitt was by inclination and sensibility a scientific materialist ill-at-ease with and unimpressed by such religious pretensions who made of what is generally reckoned in Ireland an imaginatively unexciting sense of things, poems of exact, tactful celebration....

...Hewitt was the regionalist, the poet of local lore, folk tradition, the poet whose world of non-conformist solitude became increasingly peopled as he aged by all those individualists he welcomed to a kind of secular community of the elect in his verses.¹

Brown's comments highlight the significant aspect of John Hewitt's rise to prominence in the early 1970s that is immortalised in the title of John Montague's essay, "Spiritual maverick" (1986-87).² In 1985, Derek Mahon recalled that when the Troubles re-emerged in 1968 he had attempted through his poetry to "put some of the karma [back into the North] that bad Protestants over the generations had[ve] removed".³ In 1968, Mahon's harangue against "God-fearing, God-/chosen purist little puritan[s]" exemplified widespread anxiety among 'Protestant' writers to avoid being

¹ T. Brown, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986), 4-5.

² J. Montague, "Spiritual maverick", *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 18.

³ D. Mahon quoted in "An interview with Derek Mahon", *Poetry Ireland*, 14, (Autumn 1985), 14.

implicated in their primal sectarianism ('Ecclesiastes' (1968)).⁴ Tom Paulin's 'Desertmartin' denounced the "Parched certainties" of Protestant cultures:

It's a limed nest, this place. I see a plain
 Presbyterian grace sour, then harden,
 As a free strenuous spirit changes
 To a servile defiance that whines and shrieks
 For the bondage of the letter:

.....
 I see a culture of twigs and bird-shit
 Waving a gaudy flag it loves and curses.⁵

Mahon and Paulin soon fled Northern Ireland. Of those Protestant writers who stayed, Michael Longley cautiously resisted the temptation to wrest a "harvest of ... poems ... from the twisted branches of civil discord",⁶ while Roy McFadden's 'Independence' (1971) stubbornly declared, "There weren't any / Uncommitted words that could convey / Naked truths for Independence Day".⁷ By contrast, living in Coventry and contemplating his retirement to Belfast, Hewitt was keen to join the fray. Addressing a context where dismay at the intransigence of Northern Ireland's 'establishment' was spilling over and fuelling negative attitudes to

⁴D. Mahon, 'Ecclesiastes', F. Ormsby, ed., *Poets from the North of Ireland*, (1990), 167.

⁵T. Paulin, 'Desertmartin', *ibid.*, 18-19.

⁶M. Longley, *Tuppenny Stung*, (1994), 73.

⁷R. McFadden, *Collected Poems 1943-1995*, (1996), 183.

all its Protestants, Hewitt published "From chairmen and committee men" (1968) in the *Honest Ulsterman*, in which he portrayed himself as an atheist, man of the left and victim of right-wing, Unionist oppression.⁸ With Protestant cultural identities almost universally disparaged and increasingly locked in a deadly ideological battle with an ascendant, revolutionary romanticism, Hewitt emerged as a plausible dissenter from the 'establishment' and a willing spokesperson of that seemingly rare breed, the 'reasonable' and 'good' Protestant.

As a child, Hewitt was impressed by his father's commitment to Methodism and the "rare quality" of his Christianity. However, in 1953 in his autobiographical, "Planter's gothic", Hewitt notes that when he asked his senior "what exactly he believed?", he found the reply, "the Religion of All Sensible Men", unsatisfactory and disconcerting. Pursuing a clearer definition Hewitt drew the rebuke, "we dare not. We are sensible men".⁹ Hewitt's father, Robert Telford Hewitt, was employed in a National School system under "clerical management", and his son asserts that an ever present "threat of compulsion, the dependence on the whim of one man, could not but breed a sense of unease, dissatisfaction, frustration". This evidence, and that of Hewitt's interchange with his father is interesting for

⁸ J. Hewitt, "From chairmen and committee men", *Honest Ulsterman*, 6, (September 1968), rep., T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 48-55.

⁹ J. Hewitt, "Planter's gothic", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral voices*, (1987), 29.

two reasons. First, it implies that Hewitt senior held firmly to a priority of keeping a dispassionate eye on securing the “family economy”. By prevaricating before his son’s direct questioning, he implicitly signals an expedient religious commitment; his reluctance, inability perhaps, to communicate the rationale of his religious observance or the spiritual essence of the Christian faith reveals a quite debilitating pragmatism: the characteristic “failure of sympathy ... [and] ... dread of emotional surrender” that Hewitt later claimed he inherited from him. (25) It might be argued, therefore, that, contrary to the cabalistic excitements and “gory ... expositions” of biblical texts by pulpit-thumping evangelists Hewitt was exposed to at Sunday Service, his quotidian experience was shaped by a stoic, demythologised and inordinately practical Methodism. In “Planter’s gothic” Hewitt declared:

I was never baptised. This has given me a sense of liberation; spiritually I have felt myself to be my own man, the ultimate Protestant ... I have often felt myself double free from the twin disciplines of organised religion and science. ... I can quite honestly cry plague on both their houses, and, unimplicated, set up my own mythology and magic in opposition to either, for, like Blake, ‘I must create my own system or be enslaved by that of another man’. (28)

Much later in 1979 in ‘Going to church’ Hewitt reflected: “we went to church, by custom, not compelled”; and in ‘Evangelist’ (1979) he acknowledged that whereas previously the minister’s “strident calls / drew hundreds to surrender and confess, / rise penitent, redeemed, to step

transformed / from pews”, now he and his family just “shifted, ill at ease” and manifestly unmoved.¹⁰ Roy McFadden has observed that insecurity drives poets “into themselves as the only knowable reality”.¹¹ Considered together, the evidence of “Planter’s gothic”, ‘Going to church’ (1979) and ‘Evangelist’ (1979) indicates that Hewitt’s mind set was shaped in the vacuum between his family’s unarticulated scepticism and the pedestrian rhythms of its outward conformity. Hewitt acknowledged that the theological uncertainties of his childhood were profoundly disorientating and caused him to question if: “the dissenting strain in me is so strong that I could not have remained, had I been born into another denomination, at home there either”. Significantly, Hewitt concludes, “I cannot tell”.¹² Hewitt’s remarks imply disrespect for philosophical traditions that left him contemplating a void, and they contrast with the superlative regard Louis MacNeice confessed for his father’s religious integrity in ‘The Kingdom VII’:

One who believed and practised and whose life
Presumed the Resurrection. What that means
He may have felt he knew; this much is certain -

¹⁰ J. Hewitt’s ‘Going to church’ (1979) and ‘Evangelist’ (1979) reflect on actual childhood memories. Equally, they illustrate his tendency to align with topical trends; post 1968, Protestant sects were increasingly viewed as the preserve of unlettered, obscurantist legatees of more liberal Protestant ideologies.

¹¹ R. McFadden, “Conversation in a Shaving-Mirror”, *Poetry Ireland*, 15, (October 1951), 10.

¹² J. Hewitt, “Planter’s gothic”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral voices*, (1987), 29.

The meaning filled his actions, made him courteous
 And lyrical and strong and kind and truthful,
 A generous puritan. Above whose dust
 About this time each year the spendthrift plants
 Will toss their trumpets heralding a life
 That shows itself in time but remains timeless
 As is the heart of music.¹³

Second, despite Hewitt's insistently autobiographical style, his account of that conversation with his father offers a rare, candid snapshot of family life. Notably, Hewitt's estimate of his father's character echoes with the same ponderous reserve with which Robert Telford Hewitt met his son's earnest questioning. 'The lonely heart' (1939) considers a father who:

though he lived and strove for brotherhood
 some chilling ichor tincturing his blood
 cast a remoteness round him to the end;
 revered by hundreds, he had scarce a friend
 to share the ultimate simplicities
 that compass goodness with enduring peace.

'The lonely heart' (1939) is redolent with Hewitt's sense of being touched with the same 'ichorous tincture' as his father: "I wait his smile and slow approving nod, / but suddenly I know he is not here, / and have small faith that he is anywhere,". 'The touch of things' (1933) dispassionately explores an inherited impulse to distrust imaginative and, or verbal excess:

¹³ L. MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, (1979), 253.

I know the touch of things: the play of mind
 upon the smooth or ragged surfaces:
 have reached rich ecstasy merely by thought
 sent skating over glaciers of sense:
 admire in a logical, intellectual way
 the pattern a tree makes leaning across a window.

But these remain outside me. Light and shade
 move over them, and change them, alter thought
 till I become a strange anthology
 bound by no thread save of a nimble wit,
 and find no fabric for my spirit's house.

Hewitt's father died in 1945. Typically, 'A father's death' (1953) records "no vast dynastic" event, no death bed oration. Instead, Hewitt's mother, a dry-eyed spouse, watches silently while his "father went without a word ... a lonely man went out alone". In 'Jacob and the angel' (1958), Hewitt ceremoniously abjures his father's religion and his ghost:

I wrestled with my father in my dream,
 holding my ground though he strove powerfully,
 then suddenly remembered who we were,
 and why we need not struggle, he and I;
 thereat desisted. Now the meaning's clear;
 I will not pause to struggle with my past,
 locked in an angry posture with a ghost,
 but, striding forward, trust the shrunken thigh.

Hewitt's relationship with his father clearly had a profound influence on his adult character which was widely acknowledged as brusque. Crucially, there is evidence that the reserved quality of the bond between father and son had a lasting impact on Hewitt, and that it is replicated in his emotional commitment to other significant relationships. Notably, his poetic

observations on his extended family members are marked by an almost voyeuristic detachment. In 'Ghosts' (1937) Hewitt calculates his emotional debt to his grandfather and, like 'The touch of things' (1933), displays a fatalistic, yet curiously ritualised impiety:

I have no ghosts.

My dead are safely dead:
my grandfather reading the paper, my grandmother
fumbling in cupboards, my uncle with his clubs
.....

These are flat pictures flickering in the mind
with focus narrowing, widening, blurring, lost.
They are not repeating these acts on another plane,
and when they did them they were not shadows of things
but suffering creatures moving with pain or joy

They survive now only in the brittle thoughts
of a dwindling group of people
If I could

gather the scattered colours and shapes and words
that are left in minds of a dozen friends growing old
any manikin I'd make would never stir.

The winter evening reading and asking questions
while my grandfather straightened his tasselled cap
and gave the answer, had surely spun a cable
that should hold when the hesitant flesh had disappeared.
I knew his mind and mocked him and loved him well;
he knew my rash opinions and jeered at them.

Yet he is dead and has not a whispered a word,
or shifted a glass of water on a table.
I even begin to forget the sound of his voice.

Died first to the active senses, dying again
to the senses in memory, touch and hearing are gone;
only a listless eye remembers his face.

'Ghosts' is interesting beside MacNeice's 'Valediction' (1934). Whereas Hewitt wilfully exorcises the ancestral presence, 'Valediction' (1934) quietly insists, "The woven figure cannot undo its thread" and, albeit reluctantly, confides "Pride in your history is pride / In living what your fathers died, / Is pride in taking your own pulse / And counting in you someone else." (*Suite for recorders* III (1950-1)).

A similar absence of passion marks Hewitt's, 'My parents' courtship' (1979), which observes his parents' relationship as a "love [that] ran deep and undemonstrative". The word, "undemonstrative" has a symbolic resonance in Hewitt's poems on family, the exception being 'My sister' which tellingly reflects: "My only sister, Eileen, always was / protective sister for a timid boy;". His sister apart, Hewitt's interaction with significant women, like that with his father, are overwhelmingly portrayed as semi-detached; even those poems which consider his mother and grandmothers are characteristically restrained. 'An eye for colour' declares:

My mother played no games.

.....

Her tongue was lively, notable for use
of country phrases from her mother's youth,
quick, vivid, picturesque, not coarse or loose,
not veering greatly from the simple truth.

In "Planter's gothic", Hewitt comments on his maternal grandmother that "her general effect on me was one of suppressed terror and, later, of armed neutrality". 'My grandmother's garter' (1965) declares:

I never really liked my mother's mother;
 she was too stiff and hard:
 a single kindly word from those puckered lips
 I never heard.

.....

those who knew her acknowledged her the regent
 of her grim Methodist God.

Crucially, in 'My grandmother's garter', the lines between religious and familial emotions blur as images of her stern demeanour and tyrannical, loveless religion meld in Hewitt's imagination. Written when Hewitt was almost sixty years old, the poem is evidence that this association made a lasting and critical impression on him. Tellingly, 'My father's mother' (1979) reveals a similar lack of empathy towards his paternal grandmother:

...She had a pock-marked face

.....

And all I ever heard's in character:
 thrifty, rose early, working hard, her house
 and person spotless,

Arguably, a "timid" boy raised mainly by "undemonstrative", busy women will almost inevitably find marriage a test. Reflecting that sense of 'knowing' detachment that characterised Hewitt's relationship with his father and extended family, *Sonnets* explores the mutual dissatisfactions, frequent retreats into "gaps", "silences" and "bitter truces" in his

marriage.¹⁴ In stanza one of ‘Sonnets for Roberta (1954)’ Hewitt reflects on his commitment to Roberta:

How have I served you? I have let you waste
the substance of your summer on my mood;
the image of the woman is defaced,
and some mere chattel-thing of cloth and wood
performs the household rites, while I, content,
mesh the fine words to net the turning thought,
or eke the hours out, gravely diligent,
to drag to sight that which, when it is brought,
is seldom worth the labour, while you wait,
the little loving gestures held at bay,
each mocking moment inappropriate
for pompous duty never stoops to play;
yet sometimes, at a pause, I recognise
the lonely pity in your lifted eyes.

While ‘Sonnets for Roberta (1954)’ shows that Hewitt is aware of his faults, its flat statements imply an ignoble reluctance to grow from that knowledge. Re-creating that pivotal moment in his childhood when he was drawn by his father into the superior, demythologised world of “we [who] are sensible men”, for Hewitt “pompous duty ... stoops” to “pause” but, crucially, doesn’t “stop”. Steadfastly averting his gaze from the ‘defaced image’ of Roberta, he demands of the “chattel-thing” yet more patience and understanding:

¹⁴ R. Hewitt confessed that Hewitt made her feel “very useless and hurt for myself”. Journal 03.02.1949, Public Record Office Northern Ireland [PRONI].

... you must forgive
 achieve a bold capacity to bless
 this meagre mortal circumstance has bound
 to your mortality while breath endures,
 for in this posture only may be found
 the grace and peace inevitably yours.

For I need mercy much, and blessing more,

Geraldine Watts speculates that Hewitt's inability to express emotional attachment is, "like all Hewitt's feeling", limited because he was innately predisposed to "explain in terms of rational usefulness: harbour, larder, lexicon". Quoting the flat opening statement of 'The ram's horn' (1949), "I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me", Watts contends that Hewitt "found human beings difficult to handle ... Love is there but it is overlaid with the rational tenets of his upbringing". Watts appears to approve pervasive stereotypes of 'Ulstermen' as either soberly industrial nonconformists or sentimental Gaels as she continues:

Hewitt was a representative of his 'own kind' - the hard-working, dissenting, skilled tradesmen of Ulster. There is no trace of the veneration, the emotional attachment, the setting apart of womanhood found in those Catholic writers who have made famous the figure of the Irish mother, Mother Machree or Kathleen ní Houlihan...

...Instead there is a Calvinist respect for the elders of the family, an almost biblical emphasis on the continuation of a name ... and strong appreciation of the function of the woman in family life.¹⁵

¹⁵ G. Watts, "Utility clashes with emotion", *Hewitt a Fortnight Supplement*, *Fortnight* 275 (July/August 1989), v.

Beside the evidence of Hewitt's poems on family, Watts' claim that he nurtured a "Calvinist respect for the elders of the family", and maintained a "strong appreciation of the function of the woman in family life" is arcane. Moreover, Watts' portrait of Hewitt as exemplar of a utilitarian artisan 'culture' is also unsound. In Hewitt's pre Coventry days, his 'own kind' was Belfast's privileged, Protestant, middle, professional and, as his wife's Journal reveals, predominantly male, 'chattering class'.¹⁶ Robert Greacen, for example, recalls that few women ventured to intrude on 'clubby' male gatherings at Campbell's Cafe in the 1940s.¹⁷ John Boyd notes the dichotomy between his recollection of Hewitt in the 1940s and contemporary critical perspectives:

I thought it strange that a radical thinker, full of Marx and Engels, Morris and Shaw, should be content within the confines of conventional forms and language ... [I] ... came to the conclusion that John was an extremely conventional person who lived conventionally, dressed conventionally and behaved conventionally; indeed his carefully turned verse faithfully reflected the carefully turned-out public figure.¹⁸

¹⁶ R. Hewitt, Journal, 23.04.1949. PRONI.

¹⁷ R. Greacen interviewed by S. Ferris at the John Hewitt International Summer School, 2 August 1996.

¹⁸ J. Boyd, *The Middle of My Journey*, (1990), 197. Boyd recalls several cliquey groups in Belfast at that time and that Hewitt "attracted a group of his own". (25)

Boyd's memoir is consistent with Roy McFadden's remark that Hewitt "did not permit poetry to distort orderly living".¹⁹ Indeed, considered together, the evidence of Boyd's and McFadden's comments provides an intriguing parallel to Hewitt's recollection of his father's outward conformity and "sensible" attitude to radical possibilities.

Hewitt enlarges on his middle class upbringing in 'Domestic help' (1979), which describes the influence on him of "a run of servant girls", and in 'Betrayal' (1966) which reflects: "I had a nurse when I was very small- / God only knows how we afforded her, / teachers' salaries being what they were. / Yet we lacked nothing much that I recall." Aside from the material comfort he experienced as a child, in "The family next door" (1970) Hewitt reflects on growing up in a sectarian context that gave him a "grotesque image of the majority of my fellow countrymen". Hewitt recalls, however, that a friendship with a Catholic neighbour child, Willy Morrissey, dispelled this image in his "formative years", and he details a cosy affair of shared tea times and magazines and "knock[s] on the wall". Hewitt claims that his "fifty years' involvement in the story of our country's past and the rights and wrongs of it" began when Willy loaned him *Our Boys* which chronicled "exciting stories of Cuchulain, and Colmcille and Red Hugh O'Donnell and Owen Roe O'Neill and the Penal Days, and the Famine". Through

¹⁹ R. McFadden, "No dusty pioneer", *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 12.

friendship with Willy, Hewitt learned that “Catholics, in spite of terrors to which they were subjected, could be gentle, generous people, no less loveable than some ordinary folk”.²⁰ Published in summer 1970, “The family next door” is an anodyne portrait of two Belfast boys, one Protestant and one Catholic, who transcend bigotry by escaping into a world of Irish legend and saga. There is evidence to suggest that Hewitt’s romantic exploitation of this crude binary opposition may have been calculated as a symbolic entrée to his participation with Montague in *The Planter and the Gael* the following November. Specifically, in “The family next door”, Hewitt’s naming Willy as his “only Catholic friend until university” runs counter to “No rootless colonist” (1972) where he reflects on “growing up in Ireland of the thirty-two counties” where “unionists and nationalists ... Protestants and Catholic and Jews ... played together in Gaw’s Field”.²¹ Moreover, the story does not end with this contradiction. Responding to a radio broadcast by Hewitt based on “The family next door”, Willy’s sister wrote to him determining to “put the record straight [on] her family’s experiences in Clifton Park Avenue”.²² In this unpublished letter, Kitty Morrissey plugged several notable gaps in Hewitt’s tale:

²⁰ J. Hewitt, *Threshold*, 23, (Summer 1970), 14.

²¹ J. Hewitt, “No rootless colonist”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 149.

²² K. Morrissey to J. Hewitt, ALS, n.d., PRONI.

Dear 'Boy who used to live next door' ... You were not aware we had a little brother Davy ... and certainly not aware of the intimidation my mother received in threats to my father and Willie ... the bullet through Willie's bedroom window ... the one through the landing window.

The Morrisseys finally fled Belfast for England, and Kitty's letter is evidence she had not felt well served by Hewitt's interpretation of her family's experiences there.

Set against a context of hardening sectarian divisions, inconsistencies between "The family next door" and "No rootless colonist", and between Hewitt's and Kitty Morrissey's memoirs of his friendship with Willy, indicate that in the 1970s Hewitt was in the process of reinventing himself as an anti-sectarian radical. In 1992, Ian Duig's comment that Hewitt's "progressive non-sectarianism cost him a career on his home ground" is evidence that he succeeded.²³ Notably, however, the evidence of Paul Potts' recollection of Hewitt in the 1950s further contradicts Hewitt's romanticised account of his cathartic 'awakening' to radical involvement in the "rights and wrongs" of his country's predicament through his boyhood friendship with Willy Morrissey over thirty years earlier. Potts writes of his surprise on discovering that, "all the writers and painters I met at the Hewitts' lovely flat in Mount Charles were ex-Protestant. I was the only ex-Catholic. It was as if the Catholics had not emerged to that level of

²³I. Duig, "Pictures carried with singing", *Irish Review*, (Spring-Summer 1992), 168.

society".²⁴ Offering a fuller picture of his conservatism, the evidence of John Kilfeather's memoir on Hewitt supports Boyd's note on his conventional style, contradicts Martin Mooney's portrait of him as a political "agitator, an activist and a teacher" who encouraged working-class writers, and inverts Watts' image of Hewitt as a 'working-class hero'.²⁵

Kilfeather writes:

John's greatest handicap as a person was his self-righteousness ... For years he black-mouthed ... Maurice Leitch and Robert Harbinson. He obscurely hinted that they had let the Protestant side down - Leitch by his, in John's terms, extraordinary outburst against Orangeism in *Poor Lazarus* ... and Robert Harbinson for the way in his autobiography "No Surrender" he exposed Protestant teachers for that "Trahison des Clercs" to their pupils and their insistence on teaching "little Prods" of the working class to take up their allotted place in the scheme of things.²⁶

Significantly, Potts' and Kilfeather's portraits are supported by the evidence of Hewitt's essay, "Painting and sculpture in Ulster" (1951), where his divergent analyses of the relative merits of Sir John Lavery as a sycophantic, 'native' painter and loyalist, working class street murals as

²⁴ P. Potts, "The war years in Ulster 1939-1945", *Honest Ulsterman*, 64, (1980), 55.

²⁵ M. Mooney, "A native mode : language and regionalism in the poetry of John Hewitt", *Irish Review*, 3, (1988), 67.

²⁶ J. Kilfeather, "Remembering John Hewitt", *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 35.

benign, mystical folk art implicitly asserts collusion with institutionalised sectarianism and a superficial knowledge of both subjects.²⁷

As in the 1930s and 1940s, in the 1960s and early 1970s practically all Northern Ireland's Protestant poets were 'middle-class' and better educated than most of its workers. These factors are widely perceived as being central to Hewitt's, Mahon's, Paulin's and, to a lesser extent, Michael Longley's disaffection with Protestant 'cultures' and, as the evidence of Hewitt's reference to "roaring fundamentalists and niggling literalists" in "Alec of the Chimney Corner" (1968) implies, are pivotal in elevating their rationale above that of the majority of Protestants. Watts' claim that Hewitt's 'own kind' were the "skilled tradesmen of Ulster" is ironic when juxtaposed with evidence that Hewitt dismissed the "Protestant block" as being "inarticulate" and complained that its "ideology ... offered the writer no inspiration".²⁸ Hewitt aspired to a 'civilisation' where the "artist [was] not superior to, but justly ranked with his fellow hand-craftsmen". Hewitt appeared unaware of the irony in granting the artist "rank", while simultaneously conferring on him a superior freedom from the manual labour required to maintain the "social and economic factors" he considered

²⁷ J. Hewitt, "Painting and sculpture in Ulster", S. H. Bell, ed., *The Arts in Ulster*, (1951), 82, 94.

²⁸ J. Hewitt, "The bitter gourd", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 114.

vital to 'progress'.²⁹ This aspect of Hewitt's vision exemplifies the dominant, largely unchallenged motif in critical writing after 1968, which revolved on the theme that Protestant cultures are obscurantist, implacably opposed to 'art', therefore require redemption through educative missions.

As R. A. Wells observes, "social science proceeds from a decisively secular viewpoint which assumes a world in which religion either has disappeared or exists only among socially marginal people living in cultural backwaters".³⁰ Wells' comments are relevant to interpreting Hewitt and his appeal to Northern revisionists. Specifically, disillusioned with his parents' Methodism, Hewitt explored alternative ideologies and resolved to create his own secular 'mythology' and become the "ultimate Protestant". In "Planter's gothic" he explicitly rejected 'enslavement' by a predestined order, Calvinism's heartbeat:

It may be that in failing to accept the Wesley image, if not in rejecting it out of hand, I am but half consciously revolting against the family, for Methodism played a large and pervasive role, not only in determining the emotional and spiritual climate of my people and of my early life, but in its close link with schoolteaching it also played a vast part in our family economy. This, at least, I do not revolt against, its fundamental democratic nonconformity.

²⁹ J. Hewitt, "Painting and sculpture in Ulster", S. H. Bell, ed., *The Arts in Ulster*, (1951), 72

³⁰ R. A. Wells, "A fearful people, religion & the Ulster conflict", *Eire-Ireland*, 28, 1, (1993), 59.

Hewitt's claim to having experienced only the "Wesley image" is important because it implies an artful disavowal of 'Wesleyism' or 'Methodism' that effectively diminishes its central theological and devotional aspects and philanthropic impulse towards 'them that hunger'. By embracing instead the nebulous concept, "fundamental democratic nonconformity", Hewitt distances himself from 'Protestantism', and marks Wesley, like "Calvin and St Paul and Knox and Aquinas and Augustine and Luther as outside my myth".³¹

Following on this, John Wilson Foster observes: "Although he was brought up a Methodist ... Hewitt seems more in tune with pre-Wesleyan Old Dissent. Indeed, he has expressly rejected Wesley, and if he has also expressly rejected Calvin, it is in favour of the Quaker George Fox".³² Notably, Foster does not investigate the contradiction between Hewitt's claim in "Planter's gothic" to affinity with George Fox, and the founding Quaker's fanatical belief in a "mystical inner light" that emboldened him to exhort Judge Bennett to "quake at the word of the Lord".³³ Neither does Foster expand on his reference to Hewitt's debt to "pre-Wesleyan Old Dissent", which his argument implies is a superior, secular ideology. His comments make interesting comparison to Michael Longley's remark that

³¹ J. Hewitt, "Planter's gothic", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 29.

³² J. W. Foster, *Colonial Consequences*, (1991), 121.

³³ O. Chadwick, *The Reformation*, (1972), 242.

W. R. Rodgers “came from a strict Calvinist family and suffered in childhood from Old Dissent puritanism”.³⁴

Evidence that Foster and Longley make conflicting uses of the term ‘Old Dissent’ elaborates Donald Davie’s despair at the “ignorance by twentieth-century dissenters of their own dissenting heritage”.³⁵ M. R. Watts identifies “two distinct currents” in English dissent, which is rooted in the religious politics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Calvinist and radical. Stressing the theological roots of both, Watts speculates that “radical dissent” emerged from fifteenth century Lollardism; rejecting Calvinism’s doctrine of predestination, “radical dissent” similarly adhered to a literal interpretation of the Bible and Christ’s Sacrifice.³⁶ Beside this evidence of the complexities of definitions and history, Foster’s analysis of Hewitt’s nonconformist integrity is superficial. Arguably, it typifies a dominant bias towards ignoring, or perhaps simply not recognising, significant anomalies in Hewitt’s nonconformist identity. Specifically, Foster’s comments reflect a broad critical consensus that Hewitt was a secular, radically liberal therefore “untypical” Northern Protestant. This theme is implicit in Tom Clyde’s note on the failure of Hewitt’s regionalism to “tackle head-on the core of our problems”. Clyde observes:

³⁴ M. Longley, Introduction, *Poems : W. R. Rodgers*, (1993).

³⁵ D. Davie, *Dissentient Voice*, (1982), 15.

³⁶ M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, (1978), 7, 14.

Part of the problem was that John Hewitt ... was just not a typical Ulsterman as Terence Brown noted; 'he remains ... a man of liberal, humane sympathies, whose primary instinct is to live in harmony with nature and with his neighbours, earnestly debating with himself how on earth this can be managed'. The bitterness, piety, tribal warmth and understanding of revenge which number among most Ulster people's characteristics appeared only in his poems, not in the man, and even then as puzzling, illogical influences, to be examined and dealt with dispassionately.³⁷

In 1985, Hewitt's claim to kinship with seventeenth century Leveller and Digger communities is evidence that by then he had considerably refined his 'secular' mythology; interviewed by Ketzel Levine, he declared that Levellers and Diggers advocated "people should be levelled, should be equal" and have land in common ownership.³⁸ Hewitt's comments highlight his inveterate tendency to leap-frog selectively into history for remnants to authenticate his myth. As A. C. Houston has observed, Levellers were not in fact "participatory democrats [or] social egalitarians". Indeed, Houston contends that Levellers "temporized on manhood suffrage", "plotted with Royalists for the restoration of a limited monarchy [and] fiercely rejected the claim that they intended to level men's estates".³⁹ Nevertheless, like his

³⁷ T. Clyde, "A stirring in the dry bones", G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet's Place*, (1991), 257-258.

³⁸ K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17. See also E. Boland, "The clash of identities - II", *Irish Times*, 04.04.1974, 14.

³⁹ A. C. Houston, "A way of settlement : the Levellers, monopolies and the public interest", *History of Political Thought*, 14, 3, (1993), 381-420, *passim*. The Digger

stress on “fundamental nonconformity” in “Planter’s gothic”, in 1985 Hewitt’s alignment with Leveller and Digger traditions in the Levine interview, signalled his continuing determination to forge an idiosyncratic myth from superlative secular, proto-socialist influences.

Discussing Methodist influences in Northern Ireland, David Hempton and Myrtle Hill highlight the enduring legacy of legendary preachers like ‘roaring’ Hugh Hanna; they contend that this “aspect of evangelicalism, which is deeply rooted in the Puritan tradition, had a popular appeal and political significance which ensured its [continuing] centrality in Ulster Protestant culture”.⁴⁰ Defending church-going Orangemen against charges of hypocrisy, Steve Bruce notes that lodge meetings “are conducted with an open Bible on the table and start and conclude with prayer”. Bruce concludes, “while their religion may not be tightly binding upon them yet still [it] still has a strong hold on their affections”. Crucially, going against the contemporary trend in critico-cultural dialogue to pursue the missionary impulse that is implicit in Hewitt’s philanthropic view of the artist’s role in society, when it is examined beside Hempton’s and Hill’s study, Bruce’s evidence demonstrates a fiercely enduring and severely knowing allegiance

movement flowered briefly under the leadership of Gerrard Winstanley in 1649, but was crushed in 1650.

⁴⁰ D. Hempton and M. Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society*, (1992), 124.

to, as opposed to hapless ignorance of what are often interpreted as archaic, religious cultural traditions:

Evangelicalism has a powerful place in the history of Ulster's Protestants. Its hymns, its symbols, its language are deeply embedded in the culture. Many who find it too confining, or who can no longer accept its theological claims, nonetheless regard evangelicals with a grudging respect. Most working-class men do not go to church, but they speak with pride of their mothers who did, and of their wives who are "good-living" and they send their children to Sunday Schools.⁴¹

Equally, Bruce's analysis of women's key role in preserving religious traditions is interesting beside evidence of Hewitt's silence on his mother's religious temper. Arguably the maternal influence would have had the potential to be even stronger in 'Ulster' in the 1950s when Hewitt was developing his myth. In 1947, for example, W. R. Rodgers observed: "Ulster has the marks of a matriarchal society ... Strangers in this country have remarked on the important and powerful place which the mother seems to hold in Ulster society".⁴² Strikingly, as Hewitt's autobiographical writings reveal, he was not exposed in any meaningful way to Northern Ireland's vibrant, nonconforming Christian communities, while his poetry expresses notable detachment from primary female influences. Evidence that Hewitt laid claim to a scrupulously demythologised reformation

⁴¹ S. Bruce, "Paisley: politician, preacher, prophet", *Irish Times*, 30.11.1996, 9. See also Bruce, *God Save Ulster!* (1996), and *The Edge of the Union* (1994).

⁴² W. R. Rodgers, *Ulstermen And Their Country*, (1947), 19.

inheritance, when it is juxtaposed with evidence of the central importance of evangelicalism, women and scriptural authority in sustaining Protestant narratives, questions if it is academically sound to promote him as a representative cultural template of the Protestant psyche.

In "John Hewitt : a Protestant atheist", Robert Johnstone contends that Hewitt "prefers to use 'Planter' rather than 'Protestant' as the meaning of the latter is not reflected in the attitudes of those who assume the name".

Johnstone continues:

It may have been his socialism that allowed Hewitt to explore this remote province in his verse intelligently and without apology, for it has provided a coherent and intellectually respectable background....

.....

...Hewitt maintains that in Ulster there has been a noble tradition of dissent, in a sense wider than the purely religious. He looks to heroes like Paine, Blake, George Fox and William Morris, or nearer home, William Drennan and James Toland, the 17th century Deist. This is a line distinct from that of the Church of Ireland Protestants and their establishment politics and religion....

...A poet ... is dealing with things that the bulk of people do not appreciate. One could say the same of a proper socialist in Ulster. ⁴³

Johnstone's remarks illustrate a wider tendency to stereotype Protestant cultures as reactionary and unimaginative, and they highlight Hewitt's considerable success at portraying himself as a 'maverick' Protestant, champion dissenter and inheritor of a 'purist', radical British tradition. Equally, they illumine the eagerness with which revisionist academics,

⁴³ R. Johnstone, *Fortnight*, 157, (November 1977), 5-6.

reacting to a bitterly sectarian context, advanced Hewitt's profile as unique among "the bulk of people".

John Archer observes, "if my religion is 'the religion of all wise men' I must turn like everyone else to Darwin, Mill, Freud, etc., there are no thinkable local substitutes".⁴⁴ Archer's comment is relevant to interpreting Hewitt's arbitrary dismissal of his parents' values and mythologies and, by implication, those of the wider Protestant community. As John Coffey remarks, there is a prevalent tendency among would-be "freethinkers ... to regard themselves as independent rationalists who had raised themselves above the level of the superstitious mass of mankind".⁴⁵ In 1968 in "Secular burial", Hewitt amplified his philosophy:

I have never been able exactly to define my fluctuating and wavering religious beliefs ... I agreed, out of a sense of duty and moral responsibility to any of my fellows who stood outside the formidable walls of orthodoxy; for a strong part of my nature, the nonconformist part, sets me, with hardly any effort of will, in opposition to the established, the massed practice and opinion of the time and place.⁴⁶

The evidence of "Secular burial" supports Terence Brown's view that Hewitt imagined himself to be a pied piper to a "secular community of the

⁴⁴ J. Archer, "A word for the Ulster Protestant", *Encounter*, 57, (1981), 51.

⁴⁵ J. Coffey, "Democracy, popular religion and mass communication : Moody and Sankey's mission to Britain, 1873-1875", Unpublished Conference Paper, *Liberty and Public Control in the Radical Tradition*. University of Newcastle upon Tyne. 29-30 March, (1993).

⁴⁶ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 34.

elect". Asked by Damian Smyth in 1985 to discuss "the irony of the Dissenter tradition in Irish politics", Hewitt's comments provide an ironic counterpart to Foster's claim that he was in "tune with pre-Wesleyan Old Dissent", and confirm that he was indeed a 'spiritual maverick':

Oh yes. About two years ago the W. A. in the Linen Hall ran lectures on Dissenters in Ulster ... I chose four people: John Toland, born a Catholic and raised a Dissenter; William Drennan, son of a Belfast clergyman, and founder-member of the united Irishmen; one of my Rhyming Weavers, James Campbell ... and then Allingham.

They were all Ulstermen, and for me, represent the best values of Ulster people. They were Dissenters from the totality of local society ... you see, if you're of planter stock and are a Dissenter theologically, what way do you go politically? ... John Mitchel, whose father was a Presbyterian minister ... was a radical Dissenter - but wrote very bad verse ... ends up a militant Irish nationalist and turns Catholic. Well, to me, that's not true Dissent: it's a mirror-image. True Dissent must transcend, not substitute ... Francis Davis from Belfast, a local poet, ends up by becoming a Catholic. That's not the answer. That's no bolt-hole for the Dissenter.⁴⁷

Asked by Smyth if he meant, "Dissent must be Dissent from all versions?",

Hewitt somewhat puzzlingly replied:

Yes, a spiral of Dissent. Take another example - Shane Leslie. He came from ... a planter family. His father was a baronet, Sir John Leslie. Shane went to Oxford. But he stood as a nationalist for Derry in 1910 and ends up a Catholic.

Then there's another strand: A.E., for example, a Lurgan man. He dissents from a very early age, and ends up with his own mythology, Theosophy, which is proper Dissent. But not creative Dissent.

And then, of course, there's James Cousins ... His family were Methodist working class ... Cousins became a vegetarian and a

⁴⁷ J. Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then ...younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 14.

Theosophist, and that made him a cranky type .. he went to India, becoming the art advisor to the Maharaj of Travancor. He was a nice man, Cousins. But he wasn't a very good poet.

Asked if he thought Cousins was "the ideal Dissenter", Hewitt explained:

In a way, yes. But he dissented too far. There was no growing thread right through from the beginning...

...So you see there have been very few Dissenters who have remained true to Dissent here, not rushing off into the Church of Rome or Theosophy ... I'm fond of Drennan. I'm continually quoting his, 'Neither taste more than talent / Not learned though literate / His creed without claws / His faith without fetters' - the ideal of the Dissenter.

Hewitt's definition of "Theosophy" as "proper Dissent" is ironic beside his consistent adherence to a superior, flatly secular "nonconformist" integrity. Tellingly, Smyth does not challenge Hewitt's idiosyncratic models of 'dissent', his differentiation, for example, between "proper" and "creative" dissent, the inconsistencies of which are magnified through being concentrated in a few brief paragraphs of the reported interview. Perhaps this is because by 1985 Hewitt was seventy-eight and had acquired the gravitas of an elder statesman and Smyth looked to him as a mentor.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding Smyth's reticence, when it is subjected to close analysis, Hewitt's radical anti-sectarian nonconformity is exposed as a chimerical phenomenon. Beside evidence of Hewitt's isolated disposition, that he did

⁴⁸In an undated letter, Smyth wrote to Hewitt as an aspiring poet, attaching some poetry and seeking "reassurance that it is worth continuing". See Hewitt's Correspondence, PRONI.

not, in Clyde's phrase, share a little "tribal warmth" with Northern Ireland's vibrant nonconforming Christian or working class cultures or, indeed, its "kindly and gentle Catholics", and that he embellished his personal myth by creatively appropriating elements of his radical identity, perspectives of him as an exemplary Northern Irish Protestant are difficult to sustain.⁴⁹ As his contemporary, May Morton, observed of Hewitt in 'The poet (for J.H.)' (1952):

Within, without the strange kaleidoscope,
child of his wonder, parent of his hope,
the poet, quickened by creative fire,
moulding the pattern which his thoughts inspire,
finds hot words hardening in cool delays,
his soul's salvation balanced on a phrase.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Hewitt revised 'The Glens' (1942) in 1980, editing, "I fear their creed as we have always feared / the lifted hand between the mind and truth", to read, "I fear their creed as we have always feared / the lifted hand against unfettered thought". He explains, When I wrote that it seemed true to me ... But I found that I was giving offence to kindly and gentle Catholics ... looking back ... I realised that those were arrogant lines ... The criticism was valid I think". See Notes, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991), 626.

⁵⁰ M. Morton, *Sung to the Spinning Wheel*, (1952), 43.

CHAPTER 6

JOHN HEWITT : 'AN OLD ACTOR WITH A CORE OF LIGHT IN HIS HEART'?

In Brian Friel's play, *Making History*, Bishop Lombard is asked if his "thesis on the Irish situation" purports to "tell the truth". Lombard rejects "truth [as] a primary ingredient". "History" he argues "is a kind of story-telling", the impress of a "logical and interesting" pattern on "casual and haphazard events". His "truth", Lombard explains, will be as "objective as I can make it ... with the help of the Holy Spirit". Insisting that "elements of myth" are the essential binding for historical narratives, Lombard declares these are "determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras ... what ... they want to hear ... how ... they want it told".¹ Like Bishop Lombard, John Hewitt compared history to myth; in 1985 he remarked, "you can't avoid myth. I should have thought history a myth. All our thoughts are mythological ... it's a matter of finding the most health-giving myth".²

Hewitt found his 'most health-giving myth' in the life and example of Alexander Irvine, the socialist Christian preacher and author of the novella, *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* (1913). In "Alec of the Chimney Corner"

¹ B. Friel, *Making History*, (1989), 8, 15, 67.

² J. Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, "So much older then ... younger than that now", *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 14.

(1968), Hewitt recalled hearing Irvine speak on three occasions; once with his father in 1926 and twice in 1934, first with Roberta Hewitt at a “temperance campaign in a suburban Presbyterian church”, and again at a Labour Hall rally.³ Hewitt documented his impressions of Irvine in four prose pieces. First, in 1939 the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery bought a portrait of Irvine by John Luke. Hewitt marked the acquisition by publishing “Portrait of Dr. Alexander Irvine” (1939) in the Museum’s journal, *Quarterly Notes*.⁴ Second, “The laying on of hands” (1948) is a short story in which Irvine nominates Hewitt’s doppelganger, Griffin, from F. L. Green’s novel *Odd Man Out* (1945) as his successor and “torchbearer”.⁵ Third, Hewitt submitted “Alexander Irvine and his legend” (1957) to the *Belfast Telegraph* eight months after moving to Coventry to work at the Herbert Art Gallery.⁶ Hewitt’s fourth study, “Alec of the Chimney Corner” (1968),⁷ coincided with the publication of *Collected Poems* (1968), his first significant book for twenty years. In this last essay, which addressed a context of escalating civil unrest, Hewitt ‘comes out’ as Irvine’s disciple, the Chosen One who is ‘nominated’ “to say the unpopular

³ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 38-39.

⁴ J. Hewitt, *Quarterly Notes*, 63, 133, (December 1939), 1-5.

⁵ J. Hewitt, *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 27-36.

⁶ J. Hewitt, *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.11.1957, 4.

⁷ J. Hewitt, *Honest Ulsterman*, 4, (August 1968), 5-12. rep., T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 38-47.

things, to maintain the imperilled values".⁸ Beginning with "Portrait" (1939), an uncontroversial tribute to Irvine, each of these four pieces marks an important stage in the progress of Hewitt's imaginative identification with Irvine and the parallel development of his myth as a radical socialist evangelist.

The genesis of Hewitt's myth is inextricably linked to his regard for Irvine; ironically for one proud to be 'outside the creeds',⁹ it can be traced back to his attendance at Irvine's evangelical rallies in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1939 Hewitt wrote in "Portrait":

Alexander Irvine is one of the great orators of our time, eloquent without being rhetorical; never tawdry or slovenly in form; homely in allusion and illustration; and simple in style: his deep experience of men and books giving a rich texture to his matter. He is undoubtedly a brilliant narrator; not afraid to repeat a good story until it has achieved a rhythm and phrasing that makes it a work of high art; an art that is peculiarly Irish ... Those who have been fortunate enough to hear him ... have indeed shared an abiding joy which they can but clumsily communicate.¹⁰

Hewitt's depiction of Irvine in "Portrait" reveals that in 1939 his admiration for the author was considerable. Equally, it offers a striking portent of the

⁸ J. Hewitt, "Alec of the Chimney Corner", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 43.

⁹ J. Hewitt, "Planter's gothic", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 28.

¹⁰ J. Hewitt, "Portrait of Dr. Alexander Irvine", *Quarterly Notes*, 63, 133, (December 1939), 4-5.

image he later conveyed of himself as a 'cultural missionary' honed by exile. In "Portrait" Hewitt explained that after Irvine returned to Northern Ireland, the now world famous "Dr. Irvine himself took part in the ceremony of receiving [his parents'] old home in Pogue's Entry from the trustees, and handing it over as a museum dedicated to the memory of his mother".¹¹ Similarly, in 1970, after thirteen years in Coventry, Hewitt orchestrated his own high profile return home as an exemplary 'planter' in *The Planter and the Gael*, and in 1983 he rather surprisingly, but with notable ceremony, accepted the freedom of the city of Belfast.¹² Viewed retrospectively, "Portrait's" tone highlights Hewitt's romantic view of Irvine in 1939 and, indeed, implies that he had already begun to identify imaginatively with his 'hero'.

In 1939, Hewitt's eulogistic appraisal of Irvine's preaching as a "work of high art" reflected his bedazzlement with the Christian preacher's flamboyant style, not the gospel it was undoubtedly honed to convey. Edna Longley's contention that, "presumably Hewitt was an atheist by 1930",¹³ is

¹¹ *ibid.*, 3. Introducing A. Irvine's *The Chimney Corner Revisited* (1984), A. J. Smyth explained the local significance of this event: "the Chimney Corner cottage was restored and preserved for posterity and officially dedicated on 29 September, 1934. Visitors from all over Ireland and abroad arrived to honour the man who had brought honour to Ireland. 'My Lady of the Chimney Corner,' insisted Sir James M. Barrie, 'is the sweetest thing ever to come out of Ireland'."

¹² The ceremony is recorded in the film on Hewitt sponsored by the Northern Ireland Arts Council, *I Found Myself Alone*, (1978).

¹³ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 115. In "Regionalism : the last chance" (1947) Hewitt wrote, "many in these islands seek among the rubble of once valid religions for that shelter. Some believe that a wise psychology, aware of many-faceted

supported by the evidence of ‘Salute to Matthew Arnold’ (1940) where, eleven months after writing “Portrait”, he rejected Christianity:

None in these days shall crutch my limping faith

I find no comfort in the carpenter,
 the ease-renouncing prince,

Rather I choose the calm defeated man
 who from his anxious bitterness of heart
 could grasp existence in a steady span,
 assay it boldly with unflinching art
 and patiently define
 its endless flux in an immortal line.¹⁴

In a memoir on Hewitt, Roy McFadden recalled:

In 1947 Hewitt began to attend services at All Souls church in Elmwood Avenue, Belfast (which is Unitarian) and exhorted his friends to join him: not, as I understood the invitation, in a conversion to Christianity, but rather to share his broadening horizons and the experience of brotherly love. The minister, Arthur Agnew, a well-known figure in left-wing circles, perhaps attracted him with his forthright sermons.¹⁵

human nature, will serve”. In “Secular burial” (1968) Hewitt referred to his fluctuating and wavering religious beliefs”; interpreted in context his remark supports rather than undermines Longley’s ‘assumption’.

¹⁴ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 426.

¹⁵ R. McFadden, “No dusty pioneer”, G. Dawe, J. W. Foster, eds., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 170.

The evidence of 'Sonnet' (1928) supports McFadden's 'understanding' of Hewitt's purposeful, if episodic attendance at church:

I have no time to worship. I must live:

.....

But what is there to worship if I would?
The cell and star are both beyond my ken:
The best I know is human brotherhood,
The dearest things enslaved and broken men,
So, if you will, call my hoarse, crying wrath
An act of worship in a newer faith.¹⁶

The evidence of Longley's and McFadden's remarks, 'Salute to Matthew Arnold' (1940), 'Sonnet's' secular theme, and Hewitt's discrete focus on Irvine's "brilliant" and "peculiarly Irish" performance in "Portrait", highlights a paradoxical element in his admiration for the writer that is resolved only by interpreting this essay in context.

In 1939 Hewitt's achievements were pedestrian; coming from a comfortable middle class background, he progressed unremarkably through school and university; in 1930 he took a quite unexciting job as an Art Assistant at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery and, in 1934, the same year he twice heard Irvine speak, he married Roberta Black. In a private letter to McFadden, Hewitt stated that his mood in the late 1930s and early 1940s

¹⁶ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 455.

was such that he was reluctant to answer “adverts for poetry folios” because, “I had fancied I’d look like a sedan chair at a motor show”.¹⁷ Observing it from these moribund sidelines, Irvine’s stature must have appeared international and exotic to Hewitt. Critically, in December 1939, shortly after the war began, Hewitt published “Portrait”, which provides an upbeat synopsis of Irvine’s career and exudes admiration for his fame. Hewitt’s discrete focus on Irvine’s cultural initiatives during the 1914-18 war makes it possible to speculate that the article actually elaborated a blueprint for Hewitt’s response to the 1939-45 war. There are notable parallels between Hewitt’s account of Irvine’s ‘war effort’ in “Portrait”, and his personal diary of activities in the later war in “No rootless colonist” (1972). In “Portrait” Hewitt detailed Irvine’s contribution to the First World War:

By 1914 [Irvine] had settled down ... as a teacher of literature and general cultural influence in a military school, where he remained until 1916.

In that year he felt urged to come back to Europe, to play his part in the tremendous struggle which rocked the world. Here he was to spend the next five years, travelling first throughout Great Britain lecturing and talking to large groups of factory workers and troops in training. Harassed in the early days, detained and obstructed as an alien, he continued resolutely until his compelling eloquence found appreciation, and he was appointed one of the official panel of ‘morale-raisers’ sent out to France by the British Government in the difficult days of 1917,

¹⁷ J. Hewitt to R. McFadden, ALS, 31.08.1943. McFadden : Private Correspondence.

when he was fêted by generals, shared the confidence of the rank and file, and took part in the retreats and advances.¹⁸

Similarly, in “No rootless colonist”, Hewitt claimed that when hostilities began in 1939 he initiated a series of “lectur[es] in army camps ... wrote articles ... lectured, talked, broadcast, when I could find an audience”, and that, like Irvine, he too attracted hostility and “strong criticism from fellow writers ... encounters with the vice-chancellor of the university and the then Minister of Education”.¹⁹ The parallels between Hewitt’s versions of his and Irvine’s cultural activities in wartime highlight the importance of “Portrait” when analysing the development of his myth. As well as providing evidence that Hewitt identified closely with his ‘hero’ in 1939, it also helps pinpoint the critical moment when he began to aspire to be a famous “teacher of literature and general cultural influence”.

It is interesting to compare Hewitt’s portrait of himself in “No rootless colonist” as a latter day Irvine in the 1940s, with F. L. Green’s contemporary parody of his local ‘persona’ in the novel, *Odd Man Out* (1945). Whereas Irvine enjoyed a populist image, in *Odd Man Out* Hewitt is caricatured as the pompous, self-serving cultural attaché, Griffin. Mirroring Hewitt’s status as a Chief Assistant in the Museum, the irascible Griffin is:

¹⁸ J. Hewitt, “Portrait of Dr. Alexander Irvine”, *Quarterly Notes*, 63, 133, (December 1939), 3.

¹⁹ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 152-3. See also Biographical Chronology, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991).

Employed as a senior assistant in a local firm of antique dealers. Tall, thin, and of an incisive temperament ... he was an established authority not only on painting, but on literature, the drama, religion, politics, and many other diversions by which the public sought an outlet for energies which were hemmed in by the sea which divides them from England and by their temperament which separates them from the outer world. There was hardly a platform which he could prevent himself from taking, and from which he theorised in a robust, crisp fashion. There was scarcely a stranger to the city who, coming to the North for information regarding its history, literature, drama, painting, politics, commerce, hopes, was not swiftly and adroitly contacted by Griffin and as swiftly loaded with facts. And similarly, when a new artist or novelist, poet, politician, playwright appeared from amongst the population, Griffin was there to study him from some vantage point and thereafter applaud him or dismiss him in a few theorising remarks....

...It did not occur to Griffin that, in the past, he had sometimes exalted fools or made little mistakes regarding men of talent. What mattered to him was the fact that he had to safeguard certain principles and defend the gateways of art from charlatans. (163)

Green's mordant portrait was astute and, highlighting the disparity between his and Irvine's public profiles, Hewitt was widely recognised as the butt of the satire. By contrast to Irvine, who was famous for his spell-binding oratory, Kenneth Jamison, a colleague of Hewitt's at the Museum, recollected that Hewitt was renowned for being "difficult, seemingly rude", "short on small-talk [and] disconcertingly monosyllabic".²⁰ Philip Larkin, who was Sub-Librarian at Queen's University, Belfast between 1950 and 1955 was equally familiar with Hewitt's reputation for waspish pedantry.

²⁰ K. Jamison, "A personal reminiscence by Kenneth Jamison, Director of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland", S. Flanagan, ed., *A Poet's Pictures*, (1987), 8.

Writing to Patsy Murphy in 1955, Larkin lampooned Kingsley Amis' winning of the "Maugham money"; with caustic wit he mused, "a travel book may result, like a space-thriller by John Hewitt, a verse play by Mickey Spillane, or a good poem by A. Alvarez".²¹ Unsurprisingly, Hewitt disliked being identified with Griffin; in 1945 he reviewed *Odd Man Out* and complained that Green's "localisation has gone so far that two at least of the characters should be easily recognised by anyone even slightly acquainted with either".²² It is difficult to state with certainty that Hewitt refers to himself in this review, or to estimate his true feelings at Green's roguish treatment. Nevertheless, there is evidence that for more than twenty years Hewitt made strenuous efforts to dissociate himself from Green's mischievous creation.

Published in 1948, three years after *Odd Man Out*, Hewitt's second essay on Irvine, "The laying on of hands", was his first studied attempt to overturn his Griffinesque image. By 1948 Hewitt appears to have totally succumbed to a romantic image of Irvine as a persecuted, exiled radical who had beaten fierce odds and humble beginnings to become a famous writer and return triumphant. In Hewitt's vision, this revived creature had expounded wisely and much and been cordially fêted by the very architects

²¹ P. Larkin to P. Murphy, 18.06.1955, A. Thwaite, ed., *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, (1992), 244.

²² J. Hewitt, Review of *Odd Man Out* by F. L. Green, *Lagan*, 3, (1945), 128.

of injustice who had driven him into exile. “The laying on of hands” does, therefore, give an important insight into Hewitt’s post-war ambitions, especially when it is examined in context beside the evidence of his remark in “No rootless colonist” that, “even after the war’s ending, the momentum [of my cultural activities] continued for four or five years”.²³

“The laying on of hands” is written in the first person. As narrator, Hewitt tackles Green’s satire head on by appropriating the name Griffin for his central protagonist. Exploiting Irvine’s fame, Hewitt utilises Griffin as a vehicle to reinvent himself as the preacher’s ‘nominated’ successor and misunderstood cultural missionary. Ironically, to succeed Hewitt needed to transform his Griffinesque reputation, and in the opening lines of “The laying on of hands” he set out its primary function as an apologia for Green’s parodic cultural attaché:

It’s terribly difficult really to know a person. We judge by the gesture and the word and the way it is spoken. But we don’t know the hidden things, the secret batteries that charge and determine the quality of light.

Now, I believe I am fortunate enough to have the clue to one person, the clue that makes sense of gestures I didn’t much like and words I didn’t approve....

...I speak of my friend Dick Griffin. When you hear him first he’s eloquent. After that he may seem to become something of a bore. He has ideas about most things and plans for everything. You may bump into him in a bookshop, at the interval during a concert, or when tea is being handed round after the lecture - those are the kind of places I run into him. Suddenly he’ll pounce upon you. With a terrific flow of words

²³ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 153.

he'll explain just what's wrong at that particular moment, and how it may be put right. For he's always following Causes.²⁴

Immediately it emerges that Griffin is a cipher for Hewitt's odious alter ego in Green's novel. Griffin existed only in Green's imagination. It is logical to assume, therefore, that Hewitt reinvented him within his own fictional framework to engage with that characterisation and, more importantly, to address an audience familiar with it. Travelling by train across country, the narrator is appalled to discover he is confined with his garrulous "friend Dick Griffin", but settles ruefully to his fate.

There was no escape. I was travelling to Dungannon on business. He, it seems, was just starting on a lecture crusade covering half a dozen country towns, to enrich rural culture, change dozens of lives and bring light into dark places. It all sounded so familiar. He's forever engaged on these crusades. And the next time you'll meet him he'll be beaming and jubilant at his success in whatever it was. But neither you nor anyone else will notice anything different in the state of the world or the weather.²⁵

In "The laying on of hands", the narrator's description of Griffin's cultural 'crusades' has a remarkable affinity with Hewitt's autobiographical record of his contemporaneous endeavours. In the significantly titled, "Griffin", Hewitt commented that he had risked harassment by engaging in an

²⁴ J. Hewitt, *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 27.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 28.

exhaustive campaign of writing “reviews ... articles ... letters ... when I felt strongly that a word was needed”.²⁶ Clearly, Hewitt intended to use Griffin as his mouthpiece and, as he continues his story a surreal quality envelops the “The laying on of hands”. Highlighting Hewitt’s romantic view in 1948 of Irvine as a victor over oppression and adversity, Griffin tells how the evangelist’s nineteen thirties’ lecture tours initially attracted due pomp and ceremony from Belfast’s city officials but that, goaded by a single, passionate speech supporting “those lonely unpopular humanitarian causes”, the civic dignitaries withdrew approval and ostracised him with brutal expedience. Forced to flee from Northern Ireland’s Pharisees, Irvine made a “triumphal progress somewhere else” until, “old and famous [he] died ... [in] the Brazilian forest”. By contrast to “Portrait”, which in 1939 comprised an anodyne feature for the Museum’s ‘official’ journal and circumspectly avoided Irvine’s brush with local officials, in 1948 “The laying on of hands” reflected Hewitt’s confident post-war mood and the burgeoning local ambitions that emboldened him to damn ‘establishment’ belligerence and, worse, publish the tale in a Dublin magazine; in context, negative perceptions of Ireland’s wartime neutrality still agitated its already delicate relationship with the North. Hewitt was also vexed that his ‘Griffinesque’ image lingered and, incorporating these paradoxical

²⁶ J. Hewitt, “Griffin”, Extract from an unpublished autobiography, ‘A North Light’, (1961), TMs, John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster Coleraine. [JHC]

elements, the dark subtext of “The laying on of hands” illumines Hewitt’s “taking the trouble to write” this more daring, allegorical, exposé of Belfast’s “leading band-waggoners” and Irvine’s tragic “somersault in official esteem”.²⁷

Hewitt published “The laying on of hands” in April 1948, just seven months before he released *No Rebel Word* (1948). Possibly, Hewitt’s ambitions for this, his first major collection, heightened his anxiety at the potentially negative effect of Green’s satire on his reputation; attempting to subvert it, he narrated Irvine’s story in such a way as to blur distinctions between the real and imagined to create a more sympathetic self-image. The evidence of the ‘resurrection’ motif that brings “The laying on of hands” to a close supports this. When Irvine’s body is returned to Northern Ireland for burial, the official “band-waggoners” receive it with due deference and the ostentation of a “Greek tragedy”. They have, however, been lulled into a false sense of security because Irvine had earlier returned “quietly, almost in secret” to elect a successor. Summoning Griffin to him, Irvine spoke in a quiet, “urgent voice”:

What I wanted to say to you is this. I shan’t be back here alive ... I have no time or energy for a public showdown. So this is my last testament. I should have stayed here always. I shouldn’t have cast my pattern of action over so wide an area. I should have stayed and done my work here. The life of a man of goodwill is always a crusade. I only made forays and brief raids. I didn’t occupy and consolidate. Now it’s got to

²⁷ J. Hewitt, “The laying on of hands”, *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 33, 35.

be done. Things have dropped behind here. There must be someone to supply the drive, so that we may catch up. There must be one voice for justice. One voice for progress and tolerance. Someone to light the little fires that are languishing and guttering out all over the province. Someone not bound to a political party, nor tied to a particular creed. You've got to be that voice, be that torchbearer. I've made it my business to meet most of the likely young fellows here, and you are the likeliest. Don't ask me how I know. I just know. It will be a big job ... I don't suppose you believe in the laying on of hands - Well, anyway, Dick, you're nominated.²⁸

As is the case in Christian mythologies, in "The laying on of hands" the moment of naming ushers in knowledge. Griffin is revealed as Irvine's Chosen One and, as his voice fades, the narrator closes the tale:

He didn't look quite so tubby and absurd as I had always imagined him.

So this was the clue to his causes and plans and campaigns. It was this, the rhetorical utterance of an old actor with a core of light in his heart, that was the urge behind the running for trains, the talking in draughty school-rooms, the long lectures to small audiences, the letters to the editor, the urgent buttonholings in public places, the hours and streams of words and ideas and theories, the rather bullying knowledgeability, the insistent dogmatism. And I too, in my mind, agreed that there was a good story here, if only someone would take the trouble to write it.²⁹

In "The laying on of hands", the narrator's pathetic closure systematically dismantles Green's satire and exposes Hewitt's acute distress at being publicly pilloried in *Odd Man Out*. Hewitt's "taking the trouble" to transform the fictional, self-serving Griffin into a misunderstood, cultural

²⁸ *ibid.*, 35.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 36.

evangelist is evidence that by 1948 he was inclined to implicate the lampoon in his continuing lack of status, and that fact and fiction were converging in his myth.

John Carey has observed that, "even among intellectuals who have not entered a recognized church, we can observe a tendency to invoke God when they are driven to justify belief in the superiority of intellectuals and the artworks they prefer".³⁰ "The laying on of hands" is central to unravelling Hewitt's myth, primarily because it exposes his chameleonic qualities. When its bathetic mix of allegory, myth and a smattering of 'hard facts' is investigated in context, it emerges that by 1948 Hewitt's self-image was synonymous with that of Irvine's 'nominated' disciple, 'Dick Griffin'. It is interesting to consider the style of 'The laying on of hands' beside S. Knapp's analysis of the interrelation between the politicising of canonical texts and critical reconstructions of 'actual' history. Knapp explains:

Specific narratives ... sometimes play a role in shaping people's dispositions ... if dispositions are at least sometimes connected with specific narratives, then socially shared dispositions are likely to be connected with narratives preserved by collective memory ... the narratives preserved by collective memory sometimes play a normative role.³¹

³⁰ J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, (1992), 86. Carey addresses M. Murry's belief that "the 'highest' and 'truest' art offers a breakthrough to 'ultimate reality'".

³¹ S. Knapp, "Collective memory & the actual past", *Representations*, 26, (1989), 123.

In “The laying on of hands”, Hewitt harnessed ‘God’ to the service of ‘culture’ by crafting it in a style that was calculated to engage a ‘collective memory’ similarly fashioned to that of D. H. Lawrence’s “nonconformist child” in *Apocalypse* (1931):

Like any other nonconformist child I had the Bible poured every day into my helpless consciousness, till there came almost a saturation point. Long before one could think or even vaguely understand, this Bible language, these ‘portions’ of the Bible were *douched* over the mind and consciousness, till they became soaked in, they became an influence which affected all the processes of emotion and thought ... the Bible [was] verbally trodden into consciousness, like innumerable foot-prints treading a surface hard ... the interpretation was fixed ... And this is the condition of many men of my generation. [Lawrence’s emphasis] (3)

Lawrence inadvertently highlights a predominant influence in Northern Irish Protestant narratives Hewitt implicitly disparages when he observes: “only among the evangelical sects will the average Northern Protestant feel himself on common ground”.³² In “The laying on of hands” Hewitt exploited preacher Irvine’s charismatic reputation to gain influence down among the ‘evangelical sects’. Seeking to lend authority to his work “on the cultural wing of the war effort”,³³ Hewitt took the ‘starring role’ as Suffering Servant Griffin and depicted his ‘anointing’ by Irvine as an allegory of Christ’s ‘mission charge’ to his disciples: Irvine comes secretly

³² J. Hewitt, “No rootless colonist”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 147.

³³ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 122.

to Belfast, hides from the “terror and tumult of people who discover they have been harbouring a serpent”, summons the “two or three people who ... tumbled to what he really stood for” to an ‘upper room’ and ‘anoints’ Griffin as his disciple. Hewitt’s companion poem to “The laying on of hands”, ‘Revenant’ (1948), is further evidence that he attempted to solicit a particular audience. As was the case in Hewitt’s prose essay, ‘Revenant’ allegorised Irvine’s ‘fate’ and subsequent triumph over oppression by utilising images of Christ’s Passion in a dramatic ‘confrontation’ between a great teacher and civic officials. Deserted by his acolytes, the ‘hero’ in the poem suffered to death, yet returned secretly to counsel chosen ‘disciples’:

He has come back, as some expected, and may be heard
 if you are one of us or know the password,
 talking to friends in committee rooms, any evening,
 making small trials of strength to shew he is well;
 they say that later he intends to visit the new branches.

Some move ponderously now, assured of their judgement,
 would propose a spectacular showdown
 with the officials. But he forbids all this.
 Some sit smiling on benches warm in his light
 and cannot be urged to stir and plan for tomorrow.

Others do not believe it is he, and stay away
 ostentatiously, claiming they know the facts.

I have gone once and listened, and know it is he,
 but feel he was ill-advised to come back again.
 This complicates the business.

After a week
 of utter agony I had clarified my mind and braced my heart,
 and from then on could have faced any circumstance,
 and indeed can yet, if I hold to the stubborn truth
 that he was killed, and most of us ran away.³⁴

Bearing in mind Hewitt's secular mind-set, 'Revenant', like "The laying on of hands" is evidence that in the late 1940s he negotiated with Christian mysticism and exploited gospel pericope in a self-serving attempt to portray himself as Irvine's disciple and picaresque hero of "Utopian Socialism".³⁵ Ironically, therefore, in 1948 Hewitt's 'truth', like Friel's Bishop Lombard's view of history, implicitly relied for its objectivity on "the help of the Holy Spirit".

Hewitt wrote "The laying on of hands" in 1948, three years after the war ended. Possibly, its narrative style reflected Hewitt's sensitivity to the disparity between the portrait he wished to convey of himself as a latter day Irvine and Suffering Servant of radical 'causes' in that context, and his actual contribution to the 'war effort' and the socially disadvantaged. Specifically, A. J. Smyth contends that Irvine's "affinity with the working classes developed in him the social reformer ... [and] ... carried him to the trenches" in the 1914-18 war.³⁶ By contrast, in 1940 Hewitt progressed to a

³⁴ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 65-66.

³⁵ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), JHC. See also re stanza 1: "I am the vine, you are the branches", John 14:8; stanza 3: "you have seen me and believe not", John 6:36; stanza 5: "all the disciples forsook him and fled", Matthew 26:56.

³⁶ A. J. Smyth, Introduction, A. Irvine, *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, (1980), 11.

desirable flat on the Malone Road and weekended regularly in Antrim; since his job at the Museum was not onerous, he had leisure to investigate fashionable theories, primarily regionalism and Jungian philosophy.³⁷ He also began researching 'rhyming weavers' for an MA at Queen's University, and served as associate editor of *Lagan* and on the BBC (NI) Advisory Council and the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (NI). He produced *Conacre* (1943), *Compass : Two Poems* (1944), and his first major collection, *No Rebel Word* (1948). This is evidence that in the 1940s, Hewitt fared considerably better than those confronting the hard edge of sectarianism and/or the loss of a breadwinner. Indeed, a survey of Hewitt's activities and achievements in the late 1930s through the 1940s shows he had little awareness that he, "stood in the city of shadows / In the city of scalding tears, / Where the wind-blown ashes of humans / Are heaped in the passing years" (Thomas Carnduff, 'The city of shadows').³⁸ McFadden later recalled of Hewitt in this period that while he was "belligerently anti-militarist, [Hewitt] stood back"; John Kilfeather also

³⁷J. Hewitt, "From chairmen and committee men", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 48. In N. Kiely, "John Hewitt : Northern poet of Planter stock", *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6, Hewitt is quoted as saying he was susceptible to "the effects of reading and absorbing the work and ephemeral faddery of others". J. D. Stewart writes, "John's work as Keeper of Arts in the City Museum ... was not very demanding ... for he had time for everything". See "Recollections", *Threshold*, 30, (Winter 1986/87), 30.

³⁸T. Carnduff, *Songs from the Shipyards and other poems*, (1924), 44. In "The Carnduff lecture", AMs, Unpublished paper presented to the Arts Council, (May 1974 (1960)), JHC, Hewitt recalled that this book was "the first volume of verse by a local poet I ever bought".

contended that Hewitt was only inadvertently “a pacifist because he didn’t volunteer”.³⁹ Beside this evidence, Edna Longley’s remark that, “John Hewitt’s work was indeed local work ... being in a reserved occupation [he] found himself ... aiding civil defence and the cultural wing of the war effort”, is ironic.⁴⁰ Clearly, Hewitt did not allow the war to seriously impede his personal and professional ambitions. In ‘Minor poet’s dilemma, 1940’, Hewitt expressed frustrated impatience rather than principled angst:

³⁹R. McFadden, “No dusty pioneer”, G. Dawe and J. W. Foster, ed., *The Poet’s Place*, (1991), 169, and J. Kilfeather, “Remembering John Hewitt”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 34.

⁴⁰E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 122. In Biographical Chronology, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), F. Ormsby states that Hewitt “attempts to join the British Army, but as a local government officer, he is in a reserved occupation and can only be accepted if he resigned his post ... later he responds to a press notice asking graduates to apply for commissions, but is rejected because he has had no OTC experience”. In “John Hewitt, Museum Creator”, AMs. Presidential Address to the Belfast Literary Society, 14 November (1994), J. C. Nolan contends that Hewitt tried several times to enlist, was rejected for a commission and took an officer training course with the Army Cadets. Generally critical of Hewitt, Nolan implies he was unwilling to enlist below officer class. While Longley, Ormsby and Nolan do not reference their sources, their similar accounts of Hewitt’s ‘war effort’ imply a common source, possibly Hewitt himself. In “Contribution to ‘The War Years in Ulster, 1939-45’”, *Honest Ulsterman*, 64, (September 1979-January 1980), 24, Hewitt claimed that he, “went with a colleague from the Museum to the recruiting office; we were politely told to go home, for ... we were in a reserved occupation!”. Like so many of Hewitt’s myths, there is evidence that he romanticised his war-time experiences. Ulster Museum records and Imperial War Museum official ‘Schedules of reserved occupations’ do not list museum workers or curators; in Britain, the concession to “local government employees over the age of 25 to consider them in reserved employment”, did not extend to N.I. and, moreover, it was withdrawn in 1941 when all “museum staff” were ‘dereserved’. Crucially, there was no bar to volunteering and, in *A Museum in Belfast* (1979), 40, N. Nesbitt states that the Museum suffered immediately war began through “inevitable depletion of staff due to enlistments”. See S. Paterson, Imperial War Museum, to S. Ferris, TLS, 07.04.1997, and G. Lewis, *For instruction and recreation : a centenary history of the Museums Association*, (1989), 58-60.

Caught in my prime in pitiful disaster,
 my world's walls gape atilt, about to fall:
 where must I turn for comfortable master
 to fill the hush of terror's interval?

Say - Edward Thomas, who, when earth was breaking,
 brooding on vole and hawthorn, deathward went,
 or Roman Landor, brave at eighty, making
 immortal quatrains of pure sentiment?⁴¹

'For One who did not march' (1943) indicates that Hewitt accepted he was
 in a privileged position:

My hope is other, will accept the cynic,
 the envy for the luck, the limbs entire,
 be scarce and quiet, pocketing the gibe,
 glad of the bitter hours I was awake,
 for so I must contain as bottle takes
 the fluent water and confers a shape.⁴²

Evidence that Hewitt was aware he was 'lucky', yet only ineffectually
 engaged with pacifism and patriotism, when it is juxtaposed with the
 evidence of "The laying on of hands" which reveals his single-minded
 pursuit of personal ambitions, indicates that he inclined, like Derek Mahon
 in the 1970s, to indulge ineffectually in an "eddy of semantic scruples / in an
 unstructurable sea" (Derek Mahon, 'Rage for order').⁴³ It seems unlikely

⁴¹J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 151.

⁴²ibid., 486.

⁴³D. Mahon, *Poems 1962-1978*, (1986), 46. J. Hewitt's 'The ex-serviceman' (1927) is evidence that, in the inter-war years, he was aware of the different experiences of those "Who in Britannia's khaki armament / Went out to save the wide world's brotherhood."

that an eloquent, passionate advocate of Christian socialism such as Irvine would have 'chosen' Hewitt to be his "successor", "crusader" for "progress and tolerance" and "torchbearer" for the poor in spirit.

When it is considered beside the evidence of his secular mind set and "Utopian Socialism",⁴⁴ Hewitt's persistent resort to Irvine's legend reveals that he lacked confidence in his ability to acquire reputation in his own right. His attempts to engage a religiously conservative audience by harnessing religious mythology to the service of 'culture' in "The laying on of hands" and 'Revenant' are an interesting counterpart to Herbert Read's remark in 1953 that, while the "scientific mind dismisses religion because it is absurd; it cannot ... dispose of the ever-present phenomena of religious experience". Read explained:

Religion and art are ... modes intimately associated ... Poetry, in its intensest and most creative moments, penetrates to the same level of the unconscious as mysticism ... the origins of a new religion will be found if not in mysticism, then in art rather than in any form of moralistic revivalism.⁴⁵

and individuals who continued to "go to work without a sigh, / And without worry draw his dividends." See F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 442.

⁴⁴ In J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), JHC, Hewitt described himself as a "Utopian Socialist".

⁴⁵ H. Read, *Anarchy & Order*, (1974 (1953)), 13.

The evidence of 'Practical Mysticism' (1930) aligns Hewitt's vision to Read's hypothesis that 'art' might supersede 'religion' as an educative force in society:

Gaze at a fire till it grow cold and far:
 Look at the moon till it rush hot and near:
 Then suddenly space widens, and you are
 Naked and lonely on a tumbling star,
 Your throat sore bruised by thin hands of fear.

Look at a tree, climb each bent twig in thought,
 Delve mole-like with the writhing of each root.
 Then suddenly the earth and stars are caught
 In a live mesh, and in one pattern wrought
 Till God and you are one with seed and fruit.

Then having done these things go back to men,
 Live quietly the fag end of your days:
 Speak not above a whisper, only then
 To urgent folk who will not come again
 And need your comfort, hunger for your praise.⁴⁶

While Hewitt resorted to Christian homiletic in "The laying on of hands" and 'Revenant', the evidence of 'A country walk in May' (1960) indicates that their dramatic *tour de force* was paternalistic and secular:

⁴⁶ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 466.

For nearly thirty years my chosen part
has been to play the middleman in art;

.....
I stretch my hands to make a friendly bridge
between the man whose blessed privilege
is to be born an artist and the rest
born uncreative,⁴⁷

The continuity between Hewitt's vision of the artist in 'Practical Mysticism' and 'A country walk in May' suggests that his style in "The laying on of hands" and 'Revenant' is atypical. Possibly, Hewitt's willingness to compromise his secular instincts in the service of "art" in 1948 reflected his contemporary determination to reinvent himself as a local missionary to "the rest born uncreative". The anointing scene in "The laying on of hands" is relevant to interpreting his thinking in context. When Irvine nominates Griffin as his "torchbearer", he makes a pathetic confession: "I should have stayed and done my work here. The life of a man of goodwill is always a crusade ... I didn't occupy and consolidate". This episode characterises Hewitt's tendency to meld his and Irvine's experiences, and his willingness to exploit his hero's legend to justify his local ambitions and, most importantly, romanticise his Griffinesque image. Gerald Dawe's comment that in the 1940s Hewitt, "this most honourable of men looked all around and saw what he thought he could civilise" is inadvertently astute.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 516.

⁴⁸ G. Dawe, "Getting on with the job", *Linen Hall Review*, 5, 2, (1988), 27.

Whereas before the war Hewitt had made several abortive attempts to leave Northern Ireland, during it he had managed to carve a comfortable niche for himself at home.⁴⁹ In 1945 he had declared that the “Ulster writer must, if he is not to be satisfied in remaining ‘one of the big fish in the little pond’ seek and secure some recognition outside his native place”.⁵⁰ By 1948 Hewitt was looking forward to the publication of *No Rebel Word*, and, as the evidence of Roberta Hewitt’s Journal indicates, had begun to anticipate promotion to the ‘top job’ at the Museum.⁵¹ Consequently, when he wrote “The laying on of hands”, his horizons had shrunk to the boundaries of his “parish”.⁵² Hewitt’s continuing chagrin at Green’s assault on his dignity is, therefore, unsurprising given his favourable ‘prospects’.

There is evidence in his significantly titled autobiographical extract, “Griffin” (1961), that Hewitt feared Green’s satire would damage his career hopes. Outlining his curriculum vitae for 1939-1945, Hewitt recalled that

⁴⁹ See J. Hewitt, “Griffin”, Extract from an unpublished autobiography, ‘A North Light’, (1961), TMs, JHC.

⁵⁰ J. Hewitt, “The bitter gourd”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices* (1987), 115.

⁵¹ R. Hewitt writes, “Jonny... preaches ‘not IF I am Director of the Muscum WHEN’ ... I always say ‘If you ever become Director’ and get pounced on”. [Roberta’s emphasis] Journal, AM, 09.11.1947. Public Record Office Northern Ireland. [PRONI].

⁵² In “Remembering John Hewitt”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), J. Kilscather identified Hewitt’s emotional “parish” as the small area of Belfast round Queen’s University and University Road. Only when re-established back home did Hewitt describe his decision to go to Coventry as “the best think he had ever done”. See also J. Hewitt quoted in N. Kiely, “John Hewitt : Northern poet of Planter stock”, *Irish Times*, 23.04.1977, 6.

with “peacetime possibilities ... packed away” he had embarked on lecturing and local campaigns, including “Ulster Regionalism”. He then made an interesting connection:

Naturally in the small community I had become quite well known, and it seemed fairly likely that, when the time came, I would have a good chance of being appointed Director at Stranmillis, poor Alfred, my senior, having been thrust aside by the tragic onset of ill health; so I carried on with my interests, took my Master’s degree by thesis - there had been no one to supervise my studies, the field being outside all academic attention heretofore. I heard of one professor visiting the Linen Hall Library to see for himself if the books I had listed and commented on did, in fact, exist ... [I] ... wrote my reviews ... my articles ... my letters ... when I felt strongly that a word was needed.

So it was in 1945 that F. L. Green’s *Odd Man Out* appeared with a character in it, a minor character called Griffin, an art dealer.⁵³

Hewitt’s chronology is arresting. First, Green’s book preceded Hewitt’s graduating MA and ‘poor Alfred’s’ tragic ill health by six and seven years respectively and, as his review of *Odd Man Out* implies, in the interim he was widely associated with Griffin. Second, Hewitt’s emphasis on “poor Alfred” having been “thrust aside” is perverse. A. H. George was only “temporarily relieved” as Senior Keeper in January 1952; despite chronic ill

⁵³ John Hewitt’s claim that the subject of his MA on the vernacular poets of north-east Antrim was previously “outside all academic attention” is interesting. In *Thomas Carnduff: Life and Writings*, (1994), 26, J. Gray notes Carnduff sought “to resurrect the weaver poets three decades in advance of John Hewitt’s work”; Carnduff’s papers include an essay, “Northern Ballads of ‘98” (c1934). Notably, Hewitt’s MA acknowledged D. Corkery’s, *The Hidden Ireland*, (1925) and G. B. Adams’ *Introduction to the Study of Ulster Dialects* (1948). Evidently, the ‘weaver poets’ were topical in context. The Ulster dialect archive, for example, began in 1951, and in “Ulster as a distinct dialect area”, *Ulster Folklife*, 3 1 (1957), 73, Adams noted Hewitt’s work on the “Lallans tradition”. P. Walsh examined Hewitt’s use of sources in, “In search of the Rhyming Weavers”, *Causeway*, 3, 4, (1996), 40-44.

health, he was retained as Keeper until he resigned the following October.⁵⁴ Moreover, Roberta Hewitt's Journal records that Hewitt accepted George's duties with alacrity, and that he welcomed the opportunity to "use all his charm and cunning to work himself in as Director".⁵⁵ Third, Hewitt quoted the full text of Green's wicked satire to embellish his inverted chronology and maximise the impact of a misleading sequence of events. Hewitt wrote "Griffin" in Coventry almost ten years after failing to secure the Director's post, and it is possible that events had become disordered in his memory. Alternatively, "Griffin" aspires to autobiography and Hewitt was a punctilious record keeper.⁵⁶ It might be deduced, therefore, that in "Griffin" Hewitt made a covert attempt to implicate Green's lampoon in his subsequent career disappointment; the extract highlights his tendency to rewrite his 'history' to meet the "demands ... of different people and different eras".

By contrast to "The laying on of hands" in 1948, which conveyed Hewitt's intention to "occupy and consolidate" his role as cultural

⁵⁴ Belfast City Council, Libraries, Museums & Art Committee Minutes, 25.01.1952. See also, R. Hewitt's Journal, October 1952, PRONI.

⁵⁵ R. Hewitt, Journal, 01.02.1952, PRONI.

⁵⁶ J. Hewitt comments, "I'm a neat and tidy person by nature. Here, in this deed box, I have kept in notebooks all the poetry I've ever written beginning with Book 1 in 1924." Hewitt quoted in S. McAughtry, "Trying to make sense of the North", *Irish Times*, 25.07.83, 10. In "John Hewitt", *Belfast Telegraph*, 13.04.83, 10, N. Johnston writes that Hewitt's notebooks were "dated and with an index at the back giving the number of lines written per month. It is all very ordered and methodical, like his poetry itself."

missionary in Northern Ireland, in 1961 in “Griffin” he exposed his chagrin at being denied this comfortable prospect when he failed to get the Museum Directorship. Leaving aside the deceptive inference that is embedded in its distorted chronology, “Griffin” also reveals Hewitt’s tendency to dwell on perceived rejections and ‘social sleights’.⁵⁷ Consequently, it offers a useful insight into the development of his ‘victim’ myth. Edna Longley’s remark that Hewitt “had the grace to quote [Green’s] satire on his zeal” in ‘A North Light’ is disingenuous.⁵⁸ “Griffin” is the extract from ‘A North Light’ Longley refers to, and it is unpublished. After quoting the full text of Green’s satire, Hewitt underscored his unease by making a rather ungracious attack on Green’s observational skills:

This ‘tall, thin’ nonsense - I am five feet nine, and was then something over thirteen stones in weight - was a palpable diversion; for, a few pages farther on, Green forgot this, and, with me in his mind’s eye, wrote “Griffin laughed heartily from relief. Tucking his wreathed chin against his chest he emitted a shattering guffaw”. My wife frequently rebuked me for the loudness and coarseness of my laugh. An obvious trick of self assertion, I suspect that it has, of late years, become moderated, although the older I grow, I cannot affirm that there is less to laugh about. Benedict Kiely ... once referred to me as ‘a quiet, scholarly man’, an image which, in my mind, I fondle, to offset the rather brash Griffin.

⁵⁷ J. Kilfeather recalls Roberta Hewitt tried valiantly to protect her husband from this trait. See “Remembering John Hewitt”, *Threshold*, 38, (Winter 1986-87), 31. See also R. Hewitt, *Journal*, PRONI.

⁵⁸ E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 125.

Hewitt's riposte is a telling admixture of righteous indignation and confessional merriment which levels into bathos and reveals his sensitivity to Green's lampoon; it indicates that in 1961 he had not, as Brian Fallon has suggested, resigned himself to the "role of the knobbly, inbred, almost curmudgeonly provincial writer".⁵⁹ Rather, there is evidence that Hewitt sought to transform his profile, therefore continued his efforts to dissociate himself from the stubbornly enduring image of Griffin.

In another extract from 'A North Light', "The night of the bath or the shallow end" (1961), Hewitt discussed Green's portrayal of him as Griffin and declared: "I was deeply gratified to make my bow in fictional guise". He then proceeded to depict his relationship with *Odd Man Out*'s author, 'Laurie Green' (F. L. Green), as a combative match of intellectual equals in the course of which alternating victories were played out in exchanges of correspondence and letters to the press. Hewitt described how he and John Luke (Markey) had raised the stakes in this sporting *bonhomie* by colluding to cause Green - who had a nervous, reclusive disposition - maximum discomfort.⁶⁰ They pretended to instigate legal proceedings "for libel"; after all, Hewitt reasoned, Green had, "taken liberties with us, and so he might

⁵⁹ B. Fallon, "The poet as critic", *Irish Times*, 31.08.1996.

⁶⁰ F. L. Green based 'Lukey Malquin' on Luke in *Odd Man Out* (1945).

be permitted to dance upon the hot bricks a while longer". Tellingly, Hewitt bagged the final, psychological victory for himself:

The matter however had a genial sequel. Some years later the *New Statesman* competition setter asked for parodies for novel titles and opening paragraphs in the style of Henry Green, Julian Green, Grahame [sic] Greene and F. L. Green. This secured some attention for the prize for the third was won by Graham Greene himself. I was awarded the prize for my F. L. Green entry. This was called 'The Night of the Bath or The Shallow End'. It was printed without my name, but over the *nom de guerre* Griffin. The telephone rang on the afternoon of the day I received my copy. It was Laurie, asking me what I was going to do with the guinea.

Remembering that "The night of the bath or the shallow end" is autobiographical, Hewitt's account of his victory in the *New Statesman* competition is a travesty. Hewitt implies that he came overall first with his entry, "The Shallow End (or the Night of the Bath)", and that he had bested no less a personage than Graham Greene who was third. In fact, the *Statesman's* report of the competition listed Hewitt as the winner of an equal place with the five other competitors, all of whom were awarded a guinea and had their entries published. Greene did not participate. Notably, there was minimal rivalry in the F. L. Green section, therefore five of the prizes were awarded in the "Graham Greene" category. Allen explains:

Mr. Graham Greene was much the most popular victim, parodies and pastiches of his work out-numbering those of Mr. Henry Green and Mr. F. L. Green by nine to one; ... Few competitors who tackled Mr. Greene failed to capture at least a hint of his style and attitude. Those who attempted Mr. Henry Green and Mr. F. L. Green were much less

successful ... Easily the best of the F. L. Green entries was *The Shallow End* of "Griffin", who gets a guinea.⁶¹

Allen's comments are evidence that in 1961 in "The night of the bath or the shallow end", Hewitt's translation of a quite minor achievement of twelve years earlier into a significant moral triumph was sadly boastful.

Hewitt's decision to compete in the *Statesman* competition under the pseudonym Griffin in 1949 was the second of five occasions where he purposefully drew attention to his alter ego in order, paradoxically, to distance himself from it. The first instance was in 1948 in "The laying on of hands", when he named his misunderstood cultural commissar Griffin. The third was in 1957, when Hewitt directed a parting shot at his small, embarrassingly knowing home city by furnishing Martin Wallace with details of his competition 'victory' for the interview, "A poet and his past". This was published in *Belfast Telegraph* when he transferred to Coventry, and Wallace noted that Hewitt: "inspired the character of Griffin in F. L. Green's *Odd Man Out*. (Later Hewitt, under the pen-name of Griffin, won a *New Statesman* competition with a Green parody entitled 'The Night of the Bath or the Deep End')".⁶² The fourth time Hewitt drew attention to

⁶¹ W. Allen, "Result of Competition No.999", *New Statesman and Nation*, 30.04.1949, 454. P. A. Larkin and K. Amis are listed among the Graham Greene entries in the 'commended' category.

⁶² M. Wallace, "A poet and his past", *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.1957. (NB. Like Hewitt, Wallace misquotes the title of Hewitt's competition entry which was, "The Shallow End (or the Night of the Bath)".)

Green's parody was in 1961 in his autobiography, 'A North Light', when he chose "Griffin" as the title of one chapter, and "The night of the bath or the shallow end" for another in which he recounted his victory over Green in the *Statesman* competition. The fifth mention occurred when Hewitt was interviewed by J. Evans twenty-one years after *Odd Man Out*. Evans' "Profile" was published in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* in 1968, and it is characteristic of Hewitt's ambitious spirit and continuing sensitivity toward the insidious impact of Green's lampoon, and hardly incidental, that he resurrected and enhanced his 'victory' over Green in an interview designed to publicise *Collected Poems* (1968). Evans observed:

F. L. Green so disliked [Hewitt] that he parodied him in a novel called *Odd Man Out*. But Hewitt ... got his own back through a parody competition in the *New Statesman*. His parody inevitably was of F. L. Green, and it won him second prize. Green rang him up next day and asked, "What are you going to do with the money?"⁶³

Evans did not get the facts quite right, but then neither did Wallace or indeed, Hewitt's 'autobiography'. Nevertheless, this catalogue of attempts to shed his Griffinesque image is evidence that Hewitt maintained a surprisingly earnest desire to be seen to have bested Green's satire for more than twenty years. Hewitt's admiration for Irvine is inseparable from his efforts to distance himself from Griffin; his continuing association with this

⁶³ J. Evans, "Profile of John Hewitt : 'Now poetry is what I'm about'", *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 29.08.1968, 6.

foolish alter ego heightened the negative contrast between Irvine's 'heroic' stature and his unfulfilled ambition for a reputation of substance in his home "parish".

Hewitt's impatience with the lack of prospects at home after he failed to become Museum Director in September 1952 led him to accept the post of Art Director at the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry in 1957. 'The search' (1966) is evidence that he was a fretful 'immigrant':

It is a hard responsibility to be a stranger;
to hear your speech sounding at odds with your neighbours';
holding your tongue from quick comparisons;
remembering that you are a guest in the house.

Often you will regret the voyage,
wakening in the dark night to recall that other place
or glimpsing the moon rising and recollecting
that it is also rising over named hills,
shining on known waters.⁶⁴

In "Griffin" (1961), Hewitt tellingly reflects:

In my early years, largely at my wife's urging, I made two or three attempts to leave Belfast. Several years in Canada and the United States had given her a breath of air outside: ... And so, it has been that she always sat more lightly to what I deemed my obligations and loyalties than I.

Hewitt's peculiar sense of "obligations and loyalties" made his early months in bustling, post-war Coventry difficult; he particularly regretted the end of

⁶⁴F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 160.

an era in which, he told Montague, he had enjoyed his “greatest influence in Belfast”.⁶⁵ Hewitt’s sense of dislocation may have caused him to recollect that Irvine too had felt compelled to leave Northern Ireland. Just eight months after arriving in Coventry, he wrote his third piece on Irvine, “Alexander Irvine and his legend” (1957), which he published in the *Belfast Telegraph*. This article is central to analysing the development of Hewitt’s personal ‘history’ after he moved to Coventry. In it, Hewitt again exploited Irvine’s reputation by asserting parallels between the writer’s progress from rags to recognition, and the myths of ‘martyrdom’ and ‘exile’ he had now begun to build around his own experience. “Alexander Irvine and his legend” does, therefore, mark a defining moment in the formation of his ‘identity’ as a ‘different’ Protestant, radical thinker and “Man of Letters” that later secured him the status he had long desired.⁶⁶

In “Alexander Irvine and his legend” Hewitt remarked that he was so impressed with Irvine’s oratory that he “read with the greatest care every book of his which has come my way”.⁶⁷ By contrast to “The laying on of hands”, where he attempted to dispel the ghost of Griffin by portraying himself as Irvine’s disciple, in “Alexander Irvine and his legend” Hewitt’s

⁶⁵ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC.

⁶⁶ J. Hewitt quoted in D. Smyth, “So much older then ...younger than that now”, *North*, 4, (Winter 1985), 15.

⁶⁷ J. Hewitt, “Alexander Irvine and his legend”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.11.1957, 4.

wondering tone betrays an emergent perception of Irvine as a latter-day

Josiah Bounderby:

I had discovered the key to [Irvine's] remarkable character. He was truly a self-made man. An artist at heart, he had taken himself and his material and had carefully built-up and composed a superb personality, which, so far as I could ever find out, fitted in every part. Voice and gesture, even the physical appearance itself had been shaped and determined by the creative mind within.

Hewitt elaborated his portrait of Irvine by judging his writing inferior to his oratory and, comparing his autobiography, *From the Bottom Up*, with its follow-up, *Autobiography of the Fighting Parson*, concluded that progress between them:

Reveals how much Irvine made of himself, suppressing, generalising, elaborating, adding, re-phrasing, to achieve greater consistency with the Legend, until a portrait of a man emerges complete and whole, which on another level might be taken as tintured with insincerity, with vanity, and with an avoidance of unpleasant facts.

Hewitt's comments show the terms in which he was now prepared to use Irvine's example to transform himself from obscure, 'pastoral poet' to exemplary 'Ulsterman of Planter stock'.

In Foreward to *Collected Poems* (1968), Hewitt conceded that there had been a metamorphosis in his thinking after he moved to Coventry in 1957. Discussing his earlier poems he remarked: "anyone who has heard or read a couple of these only, would think of me as a nature poet ... A break in this and in much else occurred when I settled in the English Midlands in the

spring of 1957". In 'exile', Hewitt's "rhetoric swung round from steel's high promise / to the precision of the well-gauged tool" ('An Irishman in Coventry' (1958)); and, re-evaluating Irvine in 1957 in "Alexander Irvine and his legend" he begins - albeit subtly - to detach himself from Irvine's evangelical purpose. In 1939 in "Portrait" and again in 1968 in "Alec of the Chimney Corner", Hewitt recalled Irvine's evangelical missions in Northern Ireland in 1926; in the latter, autobiographical essay, he specifically noted hearing Irvine preach at a church service then. By contrast, in 1957 he declared that, "my parents, eager in their attendance at the lectures [Irvine] gave on his periodic visits to Belfast, provided the easily assimilated information. But it was not until the thirties that I encountered Irvine himself". Hewitt also reconsidered Irvine's portrait of 'Anna' in *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*. In 1939 in "Portrait", Hewitt commended *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* as a "work of high art", and described Irvine as a "brilliant narrator" who was "eloquent without being rhetorical; never tawdry or slovenly", and whose "peculiarly Irish" art ranked him with "those other masters of patterned talk, Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats". Hewitt continued:

In this the subtle relationship between his revered mother and himself is delicately drawn; her gentleness and whimsicality, her courage and native wit in circumstances of the utmost poverty, set against his childish sensitivity, make it not only valuable in Irish letters, but deserving a place in the literature of the common people of the world, if only for the

magnificent portrayal of Anna, who must take rank with other great working class mothers of whom there is record.⁶⁸

By 1957 Hewitt was distanced from the 'local' audience and increasingly inclined to mythologise his identity as a superlative "English man planted in Ireland".⁶⁹ Accordingly, in "Alexander Irvine and his legend" he dismissed Irvine's prose as "inferior", grandly distinguished between 'literature' and 'popular' genres and transformed its unfettered language of "whimsicality" and "native wit" into an "insufferably stage-Irish" dialogue. Dismissing *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* as a "rather idealised evocation of the author's mother", Hewitt maligned it as a "popular book ... moving in parts, on the whole poorly written, cloyingly sentimental ... in its rendering of the Antrim dialect".

As is the case with all Hewitt's studies on Irvine, "Alexander Irvine and his legend" (1957) requires to be analysed in context. In 1957, Hewitt's re-evaluation of Irvine's skill and superior 'theatricality' must be juxtaposed with his bitterness at having his career prospects thwarted, his acute sense of exile and, paradoxically, his continuing need to fillet Irvine's legend for comforting parallels with his reality. Writing "Alexander Irvine and his legend" in comparatively secular Coventry, Hewitt responded to the bitter-

⁶⁸ J. Hewitt, "Portrait of Dr. Alexander Irvine", *Quarterly Notes*, 63, 133, (December 1939), 4.

⁶⁹ J. Hewitt interviewed by R. McAuley in "John Hewitt, Ulster poet in Coventry", BBC Radio Four Northern Ireland, 1.10.1970.

sweet sensation of being pushed from his 'parish' and, simultaneously, freedom from the confines of a religion-orientated society by dispensing with parables and the impress of Northern Ireland's Christian sects. Crucially, while fatally disregarding the "spiritual quickening" and "mystical touch with Jesus" that formed Irvine's "discontent with ignorance", he continued to exploit the preacher's 'legend' by selectively co-opting his polemical engagement with "the problems of social justice".⁷⁰ Hewitt writes, "Irvine's appearance at the Labour Hall caused some consternation in certain quarters, for always before his local sponsors had been respectable citizens of a conservative temper".⁷¹ Apart from offering further evidence that in 1957 Hewitt was keen to strip Irvine of his Christian purpose, his remark that Irvine's persecutors were of 'conservative temper' was impish. As in "The laying on of hands", in "Alexander Irvine and his legend" it is evidence that Hewitt exploited Irvine's fame by linking their fates as twin socialist martyrdoms and implying that he, like Irvine, had been forced to leave a 'conservative' political environment in Northern Ireland, only to blossom under more liberal 'sponsors': "citizens of a labour temper" in Coventry.⁷² Hewitt's decision to publish "Alexander Irvine and

⁷⁰ A. Irvine quoted by A. J. Smyth in Introduction, *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, (1980 (1913)), 12, 13.

⁷¹ J. Hewitt, "Alexander Irvine and his legend", *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.11.1957, 4.

⁷² *ibid.*,

his legend” in the *Belfast Telegraph* is evidence that he addressed a discrete audience of ‘alert’ local readers who might be predisposed to read his account of Irvine’s escape from “citizens of conservative temper” as a parable of his victimhood and ‘exile’. Whereas in “The laying on of hands” Hewitt imaginatively embraced the role of Irvine’s ‘disciple’ and covertly portrayed himself as ‘victim’, in “Alexander Irvine and his legend” he signalled that he too had suffered persecution, escaped and survived: that like Griffin’s mentor in the earlier tale, he was “a man set free, laughing”.⁷³ Paradoxically, Hewitt’s sense of being at a cross-roads is mirrored in the ambivalence with which he now contended on one hand that Irvine was ‘vain’, ‘insincere’ and ‘avoided unpleasant facts’, while on another, displayed a residual loyalty to Irvine when he tempered this criticism in the final paragraph:

So far as he is remembered now, the Legend is triumphant ... But it was surely in full realisation of his own share in our general need for pardon and forgiveness that he asked for his mother’s epitaph to be engraved *Love is Enough*, and the same stone covers the ashes of a great-hearted and lovable man. [Hewitt’s emphasis]

The antithesis between Hewitt’s criticism of Irvine’s integrity and these very *un* ‘Griffin-like’ sentiments is significant because it is evidence that

⁷³ J. Hewitt, “The laying on of hands”, *The Bell*, 16, 1, (1948), 33. In J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC, Hewitt commented that failure to secure the Directorship of the Museum heralded the “beginning of my freedom”.

while Hewitt abjured the mystical uncertainties of Christian socialism in 1957, he retained a modicum of respect for Irvine's exemplary 'triumphs'. Nevertheless, in "Alexander Irvine and his legend", Hewitt's tentative severing of Irvine's socialism from Christian ideology, and himself from Protestant religious influences, indicates that, as he confronted life in a 'bigger pond', he embarked on an experimental stage in his personal myth.

When the progress of Hewitt's thinking is traced through his writing on Irvine, it emerges that his removal to Coventry instilled a steely professionalism into his previously amateurish attempts at, "suppressing, generalising, elaborating, adding, re-phrasing, to achieve greater consistency with the Legend".⁷⁴ Crucially, however, in 1964 Hewitt admitted that in Coventry he had inclined "unconsciously [to] refuse a change of vision".⁷⁵ Notably, at the Herbert Gallery he acquired a reputation as a "remote and austere figure who rarely emerged from his office other than to appease the more cost-conscious councillors on the Recreation Committee".⁷⁶ In 1965, 'The modelled head' is evidence that by then Hewitt's thinking had crystallised a new direction and fresh goals; the

⁷⁴ J. Hewitt, "Alexander Irvine and his legend", *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.11.1957, 4.

⁷⁵ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC.

⁷⁶ A. Smith, "Philip Larkin and John Hewitt - two very different perspectives on mid-century Coventry", (1997), Unpublished Paper, LSU College of Higher Education, Southampton. Smith worked as a Museum assistant at the Herbert Art Gallery when Hewitt was Art Director.

poem symbolises his emergent resolve to redraw his 'identity' and rise as a phoenix from the loneliness of 'exile':

Within myself I already sense a change:
 with it there I have been liberated;
 my life of strong opinions, vanities,
 is held contained, sealed off from chance of time;
 this was that stubborn, unforthcoming fellow,
 dogmatic in assertion and dissent,
 staunch democrat but curt with nodding neighbours,
 short of talk's small change, in love with words;
 and I am left with these alternatives,
 to find a new mask for what I wish to be,
 or to try to be a man without a mask,
 resolved not to grow neutral, growing old.⁷⁷

In October 1965 Hewitt joined the 'Poetry and Literature Panel' of the Literature Committee, Arts Council Northern Ireland; since this involved regular meetings in Belfast, this decision implies he now looked homeward.⁷⁸ In 1968, Hewitt's statement in Foreward to *Collected Poems* that he was an, "Irishman of Planter stock" further illumines his thinking, since it conveys a more explicit 'Irish' identity than he later avers with his trademark hierarchy of loyalties in the 1970s. In *Collected Poems* (1968) he included his 'planter' poems, 'The colony' (1949-50), 'Homestead' (1949),

⁷⁷ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 102.

⁷⁸ Literature Committee Minutes, Arts Council Northern Ireland [ACNI], TDS, 28.10.1965, PRONI. Hewitt was similarly involved with the Lyric theatre, Belfast; he writes, "The Lyric Theatre's affairs boil up. I may have to be over sometime next month". See J. Hewitt to R. McFadden, ALS, 23.11.1969, McFadden : Private Correspondence. In April, 1969, Hewitt bought a retirement home in Belfast. See Biographical Chronology, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991).

‘Ireland’ (1932) and ‘An Irishman in Coventry’ (1958).⁷⁹ By rescuing these poems from oblivion, Hewitt rendered *Collected Poems* topical. Moreover, ‘Revenant’ (1948) was published here for the first time; the meaning of its title, one supposedly returned from the dead, symbolised Hewitt’s sense that his ‘exile’ was coming to an end: “he has come back, as some expected, and may be heard / if you are one of us” (‘Revenant’).

In August 1968, “Alec of the Chimney Corner” and *Collected Poems* were published simultaneously. “Alec of the Chimney Corner” is Hewitt’s final study of Irvine, and there is evidence that he intended it as a literary fanfare for his ‘triumphant’ return to Belfast. Like his decision to publish “Alexander Irvine and his legend” in the *Belfast Telegraph* in 1957, in 1968 Hewitt chose a discrete audience by submitting “Alec of the Chimney Corner” to the *Honest Ulsterman* which was launched by James Simmons in May 1968. As Simmons records, the journal’s earliest volumes “coincided with the start of the Civil Rights Movement in Ulster”, and from the start he “took a sympathetic interest in the CRM and reference to it will be seen in the editorials”. *Honest Ulsterman*’s “Manifesto” set out clear objectives:

We expect to print writers of varied beliefs and backgrounds. Not only Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Liberals, but Humanists, Anarchists, Atheists, Mystics, Communists, etc.

⁷⁹Notably, in 1985 Hewitt declaimed ‘An Irishman in Coventry’ as portraying his “stance to be more Irish than is accurate”. See J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, “A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent”, *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

Properly understood, Literature is a key to Religion, Politics and Philosophy, because it considers all these in terms of their value to the individual, and helps a man recognise the sound and feel of truth. The Sermon on the Mount and the Address at Gettysburg would still be of value if we did not know who had spoken them. In a sense we do not know who spoke them.⁸⁰

In 1968 in "Alec of the Chimney Corner" Hewitt's emphatic stress on Irvine's cross-sectarian appeal dovetailed with *Honest Ulsterman*'s editorial 'sympathies'. By contrast to his guarded 'exposé' of Irvine's socialist agenda in 1957 in "Alexander Irvine and his legend", in 1968 Hewitt differentiated incisively between Irvine's Christian preaching and his passionate, articulate socialism, and romanticised his earlier account of Irvine's 1930s Labour Hall speech by adding references to 'crowded audiences', 'cries for justice' and the politics of protest. Hewitt explained:

Firmer, sharper, with an edge of satire, a sharpness of attack that I could not have guessed from the addresses which I had already heard, this was a new, greater Irvine, the man who had exposed the outrages of the chain gangs in the southern states, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with Jack London, whose protest had rightly been anthologised in Upton Sinclair's class *Cry for Justice*. And the crowded audience took it with clenched attention: the Catholic shoemaker, the arid atheist, the militant freethinker, the saintly old Quaker, the fat union official, the rest of us ... We were all swept up into the tides of history.⁸¹

⁸⁰ J. Simmons, "Some notes on the origins of the *Honest Ulsterman*", *Honest Ulsterman*, 95, (1993), 9, 4, 5. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed in 1967 and held a series of marches in 1968. See W. D. Flackes and S. Elliott, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory 1968-1993*, (1994), 2-3.

⁸¹ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 41.

Hewitt embellished Irvine's speech with an anecdote of his own, failed attempt to rekindle Irvine's 'torch' for social justice. Subtly reinforcing the ideological schism between Irvine's politics and his Christianity, Hewitt confessed his inability to communicate effectively with the "average Northern Protestant". Hewitt explained:

I invited three young men to the flat one evening. But here the ambiguity which cut through Irvine like a geological fault was painfully laid bare. For the Irvine they respected and the jargon they used for their regard were cast in the evangelical mould ... Talking to them I had to pick my words with care, had to put forward myself the ambiguous phrase, presenting the two-sided image with their side uppermost ... His politics they never guessed. His professional skill they had no awareness of. So, rather on a note of bewildered cordiality, we parted. A letter or two passed between us. We never met again.⁸²

Hewitt's comments indicate that he blamed his abortive crusade on the inherent shortcomings of three "evangelical" dullards. Bearing in mind his chosen 'audience' and a context where Protestant cultures were being comprehensively traduced, it is unsurprising that Hewitt tried to erase potentially embarrassing links between his myth and the religion and cultures of the "uneducated people" among whom, Lawrence witheringly commented, "you will still find revelation rampant".⁸³ Regrettably, by affecting ignorance of the religiously Protestant world view, Hewitt

⁸²J. Hewitt, *ibid.*, 43.

⁸³D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, (1931), 6.

misrepresented Irvine's purpose and, crucially, diminished the energising force that had made him a tireless advocate of social justice. Irvine explained: "spiritual quickening gave me discontent with ignorance ... names, systems, theories, or creeds did not interest me ... I wanted to be able to say, THIS I KNOW".⁸⁴ Beside this evidence, Ian Duhig's view that "Hewitt's Protestantism nurtured the libertarian socialism he developed" is inappropriate.⁸⁵ Robert Greacen's comment that Hewitt's "driving force [was the] examination of the Ulster Protestant psyche" is equally banal.⁸⁶

In 1939, "Portrait" is an anodyne study of Irvine and it reveals that Hewitt's public image then was as a "staunch supporter of the status quo".⁸⁷ In 1948 in "The laying on of hands", Hewitt's thinly disguised polemic and hyperbolic style reflects his post-war optimism, egocentric temper, burgeoning ambition and engrossment in fashionable theories. Hewitt crafted the story with religious allusions and dramatic rhetoric to engage a conservative audience and reinvent himself as Irvine's successor and "voice for progress and tolerance" and banish the ridiculous Griffin. In

⁸⁴ A. Irvine quoted by A. J. Smyth in Introduction, *My Lady of the Chimney Corner*, (1980 (1913)), 12-13.

⁸⁵ I. Duhig, "Pictures carried with singing", *Irish Review*, 12, (Spring-Summer 1992), 165.

⁸⁶ R. Greacen, "Ulster senior league", *Books Ireland*, 62, (April 1982), 55.

⁸⁷ In J. Hewitt, "Alec of the Chimney Corner", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 40, Hewitt implies that this was Irvine's public image in the 1930s.

1957, "Alexander Irvine and his legend" reflects Hewitt's changing mood as, adjusting to 'exile', he renegotiates his status as a 'man of letters' among his "own kind". By 1968 Hewitt's thinking had clarified and he was ready to release Irvine to the legends of the "vulgar" folks: the "roaring fundamentalists and the niggling literalists who played so great a part in the lives of the Ulster working-class nonconformists".⁸⁸ In "Alec of the Chimney Corner" he artfully distanced himself from the narrative style of "The laying on of hands" by implying that his theatrical "modifications" to Irvine's story had been a prudent subterfuge in 1948. Hewitt also sharpened the swingeing attack on *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* he had put forward in 1957 in "Alexander Irvine and his legend"; he declared that, apart from "one or two of the more pathetic passages ... the general quality of [Irvine's] prose, and the artificiality of the Antrim dialect affronted my sense of literary decorum". In 1968, Hewitt's refined "sense of literary decorum" implies he now took a dismissive view of the creative force that gave *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* its luminous quality and, by implication, of the cultural mores of a substantial, empathetic readership that ensured it remained a much-loved classic in Irish literature.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ J. Hewitt, "Alec of the Chimney Corner", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 43, and D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, (1931), 6. Discussing the Bible's influence on English non-conformist cultures Lawrence writes, "We detest the 'chapel' and the Sunday-school feeling which the Bible must necessarily impose on us. We want to get rid of all that *vulgarity* - for vulgarity it is". [Lawrence's emphasis]

⁸⁹ J. Hewitt, "Alec of the Chimney Corner", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 38. Hewitt conceded that the strength of the book's local popularity was such that it

Introducing “Alec of the Chimney Corner” in 1968, Hewitt declared: “it was sometime in the Autumn of 1934 that I first met Dr Alexander Irvine”. Four paragraphs later, Hewitt contradicted himself by recollecting that he heard Irvine preach in 1926. Particularising the memoir, Hewitt observed that he had done so purely at his father’s behest; grudgingly conceding Irvine’s “strange authority” he added the caveat that he had not been “all that anxious to hear him”, and that he had been “far from convinced of the greatness in him so reverentially saluted by my seniors”. Hewitt’s comments reveal his anxiety to distinguish between his ‘reluctant’ appearance as a congregant at Irvine’s rally in 1926 and his personal introduction to him in 1934 and suggest that, compared to his emphases in his earlier studies, in 1968 his regard for his hero is now equivocal.

Key similarities between Hewitt’s accounts of his ‘anointing’ by Irvine in “The laying on of hands” (1948), “Alexander Irvine and his legend” (1957) and “Alec of the Chimney Corner” (1968) are evidence that, on balance, Irvine and Hewitt did meet privately in 1934. Indeed, there is an ironic parallel between Hewitt’s version of events and F. L. Green’s caricature of him as the ubiquitous ‘Griffin’ rushing to assess new talent from a privileged “vantage point”. All locate the occasion at a breakfast meeting at a Belfast hotel (two specify the Kensington); all convey Irvine’s

enabled him to persuade a “sub-committee” of the Museum to purchase Luke’s painting of Irvine in 1939. (45)

'prophecy' that his 'persecutors' would become "chief mourners" and perform ostentatious grief. In "The laying of hands" Irvine's 'prophecy' is invested with mystical significance and followed by Griffins' 'anointment' as 'torchbearer' and unveiling as "an old actor with a core of light in his heart". Hewitt's style is indicative of his willingness to conform to the dominant ethos of a 'home' audience. By contrast, "Alexander Irvine and his legend" and "Alec of the Chimney Corner" reflect Hewitt's disenchantment with local concerns after his career disappointment and what he later portrayed as his 'exile' to Coventry. In these pieces, Irvine's 'prophecy' is recalled as a humorous quip. In the last essay, which was published simultaneously with the first serious and, crucially, organised civil protests in Northern Ireland, Hewitt exploited this motif to darker effect; now Irvine's "amusing" anecdote was used as an introit to a more direct questioning of his sincerity and Christian integrity:

And here the old actor in him assumed control: there were unpopular things to be said in Ulster, values to be maintained. ... Someone was needed to say the unpopular things, to maintain the imperilled values ... there were some lads who looked to him for help. Could I take over and provide that help?⁹⁰

Embellishing this portrait, Hewitt implies that Irvine was motivated by an "eagerness for platform success, an urge for social justice, and profound

⁹⁰J. Hewitt, "Alec of the Chimney Corner", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 46.

love for humanity". Typically mercurial, Hewitt then tempered his attack on Irvine with the remark that "a proper consideration of the whole man reduces these elements to their due proportions". Hewitt continued:

Because his intentions were life-enhancing and his skills always used for humane ends, I cannot judge him as other than a man of rare, loveable and abiding goodness. But because of the built-in ambiguities which his course necessitated, he laid himself open to easy misunderstanding and failed to become a writer of quality.⁹¹

Hewitt's simultaneous exposure, and defence of Irvine's resort to 'necessary ambiguities', characterises the paradox at the heart of his fascination with Irvine as an icon, and the preparedness he shared with Brian Friel's Bishop Lombard to allegorise his personal narrative as occasion demanded. By publishing "Alec of the Chimney Corner" in the *Honest Ulsterman*, which in 1968 boasted a subversively liberal agenda, Hewitt signalled that, after eleven years in the 'wilderness', he was ready to engage with the revolutionary possibilities emerging at home. By contrast to 1948 in "The laying on of hands" where Hewitt was content to be Irvine's 'disciple', in 1968 he signalled his readiness to leave the shadow of the legend and publicly "worship ... a newer faith" ('Sonnet'). Hewitt's problem was, as he conceded in "Alec of the Chimney Corner", that he lacked the skills to communicate with all but the 'alert'. Ironically, although

⁹¹ *ibid.*,

he was now disdainful of Irvine's overt Protestantism, Hewitt needed to utilise his legend one last time to obscure his Griffinesque, pre Coventry conservative persona and reinvent himself as "an old actor with a core of light at his heart". In the closing remarks of "Alec of the Chimney Corner", Hewitt presents his and Irvine's careers as a joint crusade, and his words characterise the amazing subtlety of his myth making: "my old assessment of the dominant circles in Northern Ireland was still valid ... Irvine's and my own battles still remain to be fought again and again".

When they are considered as a discrete body of evidence, Hewitt's essays on Irvine comprise a 'history' of his "most health-giving myth". When this 'history' is investigated, it exposes Hewitt's considerable reliance on Irvine's legend, and questions re-estimates of him as a unique, radical prophet. Seamus Heaney's remark that "Hewitt's work has been one of coming to terms, of measuring the self against circumstances ... [and] ... those accurate, painful quests towards self-knowledge that at once rebuke and reward us" is ironic.⁹² In 1970, just two years after "Alec of the Chimney Corner" was published, the Arts Council Northern Ireland sponsored Hewitt's participation in *The Planter and the Gael* with John Montague. This event was a major factor in Hewitt's elevation to arch

⁹² S. Heaney, "The poetry of John Hewitt", *Threshold*, 22, (Summer 1969), 77.

defender of the “gateways of art from charlatans”. ‘Griffin’ had finally secured an audience.

CHAPTER 7

A PERFECT PROTESTANT?

"I cannot be other than what this land engendered me"

Louis MacNeice : 'Valediction'

The title of John Hewitt's *An Ulster Reckoning* (1971) symbolises the coincidence of his rise to prominence with the escalation of civil strife in Northern Ireland. From the late 1960s the largely Protestant, Unionist population came under immense pressure to analyse and defend its cultural and political allegiance to Britain. This had an enormous impact on literary critical dialogue. As poets responded to the Troubles, pertinent criticism followed, became institutionalised and divided along sectarian lines.¹ Critics such as Seamus Deane single-mindedly pursued a romantic "repossession" of the Irish imagination from its colonial imprint. By contrast, Edna Longley stressed the need for more complex cultural negotiations; she became the central protagonist of a reactive critical body that, perceiving its existence threatened, narrowly fought to sustain the concept of a philanthropic Anglo-Irish literary culture as a vital continuum. Paralleling growing antipathy towards Protestant cultures, Longley increasingly distinguished between Anglo-Irish and Northern Irish 'Protestant' writing,

¹In *Seamus Heaney : The Making of a Poet* (1993), 120, M. Parker discusses the pressure on writers to comment on the Troubles and Heaney's concomitant decision to leave Northern Ireland in 1972.

and denounced an insidious critical tendency to preserve the “old, vital Anglo-Irish confrontation ... however different Protestant Ulster is from the world that cast up that vanished literary Ascendancy”.² The evidence of Longley’s comments is central to understanding the interrelation between Hewitt’s portrayal of himself as being different in kind to the Protestant majority in the North and his rise to prominence in the 1970s. Specifically, Hewitt claimed to be a superlative “English man planted in Ireland”, secular dissenter, and persecuted high-priest of a prophetic, anti-romantic, radical socialism in the 1940s.³ Accordingly, Hewitt proved an attractive champion to critics seeking to advocate pluralism as an alternative to what some portrayed as a tradition of homogenising romantic nationalism.

In 1945 Hewitt’s poem, ‘I write for...’, declared:

I write for my own kind,
 I do not pitch my voice
 that every phrase to be heard
 by those who have no choice:
 their quality of mind
 must be withdrawn and still,
 as moth that answers moth
 across a roaring hill.

²E. Longley, “Stars and horses, pigs and trees”, *Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (Northern Issue), 3, 2, (1979), passim. [CBIS].

³J. Hewitt interviewed by R. McAuley in “John Hewitt, Ulster poet in Coventry”, BBC Radio Four Northern Ireland, 1.10.1970.

Introducing *Across a Roaring Hill: the Protestant imagination in modern Ireland* (1985), Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley observed that 'I write for...', "transforms the narrowing phrase 'my own kind' - an Ulster code for tribal allegiance - to invoke the total human audience his [Hewitt's] poetry may reach. The 'roaring hill' that impedes hearing represents our indigenous Irish din, as well as the general turmoil of the world". On the other hand, Hewitt's 'Ars Poetica' (1965) states, "If you can frame the questions, it is well;". Close study of Hewitt reveals that the most pressing, unanswered question is, just who are his "own kind".

Across a Roaring Hill comprised a series of essays published in honour of Hewitt. These were commissioned to "isolate[s], and examine[s] ... ways which some Protestant poets, novelists and dramatists contribute to twentieth-century Irish consciousness". Introducing the book, Dawe and Longley stated that "an ineradicable consciousness of *difference*, of being defined in, and against another culture, makes Irish Protestantism and its literary consequences a special case". [Dawe's and Longley's emphasis] Notably, Dawe and Longley differentiate between 'Irish Protestantism' and 'Ulster Protestantism'; the former is a synonym for Anglo-Ireland and the romanticism of W. B. Yeats, and the latter for a culture of "subterranean self-expression", "less evolved structures", and "Belfast working-class accents". (x) *Across a Roaring Hill* also elaborated Dawe's and Longley's response to Seamus Deane's proposal in 1984 to challenge the hegemony of

Anglo-Irish and British colonial culture with a new collection of Irish writing, the *Field Day Anthology* (1991).⁴

Marilynn Richtarik has observed that by the mid 1980s, "Field Day, a Northern Irish artistic and critical collective" had popularised a "certain philosophical approach to the study of Irish literature and culture ... centre[d] on the idea of Ireland as a post-colonial country and of the violence in Northern Ireland as a lingering effect of colonial rule".⁵ In 1988, 'Unison' commented:

Field Day attracted adequate funding because of its intellectual credibility. There was general agreement that Field Day served as a model in many ways - in its professionalism, in the proportion of its expenditure spent on publicity and marketing, in its capacity to attract funds from unusual sources, in the prestigious constitution of its Board.⁶

Richtarik's and 'Unison's' remarks exemplify the largely positive response to Field Day. Conversely, Patricia Craig suggested that *Across a Roaring Hill* was only of "moderate value" in awakening interest in Ireland's 'Protestant imagination', that "no synthesis emerges, no especially striking exegesis is advanced, and there isn't too much dash about the enterprise".⁷

⁴ S. Deane, "Heroic Styles : The Tradition of an Idea", Field Day Pamphlet, 4, (1984).

⁵ M. J. Richtarik, Introduction, *Acting Between the Lines : The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics 1980-1994*, (1994), 5.

⁶ Unison, "Yelling in unison - an arts lobby proposed", *Linen Hall Review*, 5, 2, (1988), 16.

⁷ P. Craig, "Elusive allegiances", *Times Literary Supplement*, 1.11.1985, 1238.

Craig's comments typify generally lukewarm criticism of *Across a Roaring Hill*. W. J. McCormack, for example, expressed disquiet that the book was "constructed ... on what can only be regarded as an exclusivist Protestant franchise"; analysing Longley's editorship, he deduced that the project was a "calamitous error of judgment".⁸ Peter McDonald more measuredly identified the demerits of *Across a Roaring Hill*'s defence of a marginalised literary culture. McDonald maintained that the book's, "official subject invites the partition of the imagination into categories ... includes a good deal of valuable scholarship and criticism, [but] does not succeed in establishing the validity of Protestantism as a literary category".⁹ When they are considered beside Richtarik's and 'Unison's' summaries of enthusiastic responses to Field Day, Craig's, McCormack's and McDonald's estimates of *Across a Roaring Hill* are evidence that Deane's proposal gathered a dynamic momentum and made a superior impact in the mid 1980s.

Field Day reached its acme with *Field Day Anthology* (1991). Deane had conceived the project as an allegory of repossession, "a kind of work-in-

⁸ W. J. McCormack, *The Battle of the Books*, (1986), 65. Interestingly, McCormack contributed to *Across a Roaring Hill*. In, *How's The Poetry Going : Literature and Politics & Ireland Today* (1991), G. Dawe defended *Across a Roaring Hill* from criticism, particularly that levelled by McCormack.

⁹ P. McDonald, "Starting to explore the Prod mind", *Honest Ulsterman*, 79, (1985/6), 68.

progress, an invention of the present moment and thereby a reinvention of the past".¹⁰ A much later remark by Deane in 1997 indicates that he sustained this philosophical view of the literary 'canon's' performative function: "one way of coming into self-possession, of overcoming any kind of oppression, colonial or otherwise, is to take charge of interpretation yourself, not to allow yourself to be interpreted by others".¹¹ However, as Richtarik has observed:

In its local aspect Field Day, especially in its early years, has been part of the more general attempt by artists and intellectuals to circumvent politics through culture. The difficulty with this programme was and is that culture in Northern Ireland is thoroughly politicized.¹²

Richtarik's comments highlight the aphid-like sectarian impulses in Northern Ireland's cultural politics that finally overwhelmed Field Day's bravura enthusiasms.¹³ Analysing 'The Ulster renaissance' that generated

¹⁰ S. Deane, "Hot house flowers or Anthologica Hibernica", *Gown*, (Spring/Summer 1990), 19.

¹¹ S. Deane quoted in C. Rumens, "Reading Deane", *Fortnight*, 363, (July/August 1997), 30.

¹² M. J. Richtarik, *Acting Between the Lines : The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics 1980-1994*, (1994), 7.

¹³ Addressing the bitter debates engendered by Field Day, in 1996 Seamus Deane commented, "because of the hostility we provoked - from the usual suspects - ... we opened up a variety of kinds of debate. By our insistent claim that the relationship between art and politics had to be affirmed and explored in a complex and careful way, and that art was one field of discourse among many, we helped to develop a healthy dialogue. I reject the accusation that we have only looked at politics from the standpoint of a nationalist or republican tradition ... I used to be angry, now I'm indifferent ... I have been forced to re-think and my own ignorance has been overcome; some people's ignorance, though, is invincible". Deane quoted in H. Meaney, "The Deane of studies faces identity crisis", *Irish Times*, 10.09.1996, 10.

the enterprise, D. Lehman and D. Foote deduced that, "the subordination of aesthetics to politics is usually a sure-fire formula for disaster".¹⁴ Evidence that Deane sought through Field Day to harness his country's literature to a project of self-empowerment and, paradoxically, 'national' assertion ironically counterpoises the evidence of *Across a Roaring Hill* through which Dawe and Longley attempted to establish 'special category status' for "Irish Protestantism and its literary consequences".

In his essay on perceptions of 'other' in a divided society, Frank Wright contends that, even in intense conflicts like Northern Ireland "hostility ... is theoretical in origin", and that adherence to theory "designates" opponents.¹⁵ Following on this, it is useful to observe that contributing scholars to *Across a Roaring Hill* were primarily associated with Trinity, Queen's and the University of Ulster and *Field Day Anthology* scholars with University College Dublin. Interpreted beside Wright's hypothesis, this evidence provides a useful perspective on the involvement of academic institutions in sponsoring combative local discourse. This aspect of critical dialogue in Ireland is reflected in, for example, Edna Longley's view that University College Dublin exercises influence "proportionate to Trinity's

¹⁴D. Lehman and D. Foote, "The Ulster renaissance", *Newsweek* (International Edition), May 12, (1986), 52.

¹⁵F. Wright, "Protestant ideology and politics in Ulster", *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie*, 14, 2, (1973), 217. Wright examined solidarity in "catholic participation in political power".

decline from ascendancy to marginalisation".¹⁶ A graduate of Trinity, Longley sternly champions Anglo-Irish literary traditions against "indigenous axes" wielded in what she interprets as Field Day's ascendant, 'echt-Gaelic' post-colonial, "spurious 'wholeness'".¹⁷ This is a consistent theme in Longley's writing and, galvanised by Field Day's success, in the mid 1980s she spearheaded a fierce rearguard defence of Anglo-Irish literature, especially Yeats. In "Opening up : a new pluralism", Longley outlined her resistance to Field Day as a conceptual framework for Ireland's post-colonial discourse:

The extent to which 20th century Irish writing meshes with English writing remains an area troubled by politics ... For instance, Yeats's soul-debts either tend to be over-stressed - when he is called 'unionist' - or overlooked. Because Anglo-Ireland has vanished, some of its positive implications for Northern Ireland are forgotten. And the multiple ties between the Republic and Britain have been largely inadmissible to political rhetoric....

¹⁶E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 10. UCD emerged from the Catholic University of Ireland founded by J. H. Newman and P. Cullen in the 19c. When it opened in 1592, Trinity was an Anglo-Irish institution. M. Irvine writes, the "Universities Act ... replaced the old Royal University and Queen's Colleges [with] the National University of Ireland ... the colleges of the National University were formally non-denominational, but the Catholic Church had considerable influence within governing bodies and they became in practice mainly Catholic institutions ... Catholics were forbidden by their bishops to attend Trinity as a danger to their faith, a ban generally observed". See Irvine, *Northern Ireland : Faith and Faction*, (1991), 43, 78. For analysis of institutionalised loyalties and the *Field Day Anthology's* editors, etc., see J. C. Green, P. L. Haberstroh and A. Frazier, "Wealth, gender, politics : three views of the Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing", *Eire-Ireland*, 27, 2, (1992 (3)), 111-131. This identifies most Field Day scholars as being from University College Dublin and suggests a more appropriate title for the *Field Day Anthology* might be, *UCD Anthology*. See also M. Richtarik, *Acting Between the Lines* (1994).

¹⁷E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 10, and "North's neglected consciousness", *Honest Ulsterman*, 79, (Autumn 1985), 59.

...In my view the Field Day cultural project, with its initial anti-colonial thrust, unduly suppressed these ties (it was Seamus Deane who called Yeats unionist). However, Field Day's horizons have widened, and the following prospectus for its forthcoming *Anthology of Irish Writing* stresses pluralism.¹⁸

Evidence that Longley approved Field Day's putative gesture towards 'pluralism' is vital to understanding her advancement of Yeats as the "great (not necessarily definitive) model for synthesis for the fusion of plural inheritance within a single framework".¹⁹ Assessing Denis Donoghue's treatment of Yeats in *We Irish* (1987), Longley discerned the "unitary preconceptions" she objected to in Field Day which, she argued, "make the literary pieces fit a prescribed jigsaw shape - the map of Ireland - instead of

¹⁸ E. Longley, "Opening up : a new pluralism", R. Johnstone and R. Wilson, ed., *Troubled Times : Fortnight Magazine and the Troubles in Northern Ireland*, (1991 (1987)), 143. Criticism of Field Day projects in the mid 1980s provoked Seamus Deane to accuse Longley of being "preternaturally alert to the next step in the Field Day conspiracy". See Deane, "Hot house flowers or Anthologica Hibernica", *Gown*, (Spring/Summer 1990), 19. In "Field Day five years on", *Linen Hall Review*, 2, 2, (1985), 4-10, J. Gray expressed dismay at polarised critical debates that horribly reflected a grotesque, sectarian context. Appraising the Field Day Project, Gray regretted a "controversy voiced by academics in unacademic terms". Pointing to Professor Owen Dudley Edwards' comment, "To taste a puker shade of green, / Imbibe a Professor Seamus Deane", Gray prophetically observed: "so long as Field Day illuminates and inspires change in that necessary debate it has life. If it comes actually to obscure the issues then what Rea describes as 'its own inbuilt death' will occur". In "Edna Longley and the reaction from Ulster; fighting or writing?", *The Battle of the Books*, (1986), 66-71, W. J. McCormack writes that Longley's "sustained opposition to *Field Day* has ... brought the new propagandists directly into confrontation with the view of literature obtaining in the universities ... Longley's education at Trinity College, Dublin can hardly have inculcated anything more up to date than the practices of the Georgians - her conservative stance is more advanced than that of her origins". (61) See also T. Herron, "Review, *The Living Stream*, Edna Longley", *Irish Studies Review*, 9, (Winter 1994/5), 48-49.

¹⁹ E. Longley, "Searching the darkness", D. Dunn, ed., *Two Decades of Irish Writing*, (1975), 118.

investigating the shape they make by themselves".²⁰ Suggesting that *We Irish* exemplified a "new vigour in indigenous Irish literary criticism", Longley complained, "Donoghue underestimates the extent to which the "We", not the "Irish", causes problems. Yeats as prophet of Irishness ... seems unacceptable. This is because Protestant Northern Ireland has become a sub-text of Anglo-Ireland".²¹

Longley's comments imply a negative comparison between the "mongrel qualities" of literature from the 'Protestant North' and the Anglo-Irish contribution to "twentieth-century Irish consciousness".²² Longley's difficulty was, as she conceded, that "Anglo-Ireland has vanished". In 1979 in "Stars and horses, pigs and trees" she had attempted to challenge entrenched nationalisms and partial ideologies by suggesting that poetry "from the North of Ireland" ought to be recognised "irrespective of artificial borders".²³ By 1988, Longley had considerably refined her argument; seeking to demonstrate continuity in Ireland's Anglo-Irish literary heritage, in *Louis MacNeice* (1988) she nominated MacNeice as

²⁰ E. Longley, "Opening up : a new pluralism", R. Johnstone and R. Wilson, ed., *Troubled Times : Fortnight Magazine and the Troubles in Northern Ireland*, (1991), 143.

²¹ E. Longley, "Hauteur, hauteur", *Times Literary Supplement*, 05.06.1987, 612.

²² E. Longley, "Progressive Bookmen", *Irish Review*, 1, (1986), 50, and G. Dawe and E. Longley, ed., *Across a Roaring Hill*, (1985), i.

²³ E. Longley, CBIS, 3, 2 (1979), 474-80, *passim*.

Yeats' successor. Crucially, Longley insisted that "because MacNeice's poetry dramatizes polarities engendered by Ireland, such as that between belonging and alienation, it has become a focus on the literary wing of current debates about 'identity' in Northern Ireland". (xiii) For Longley, MacNeice was "the major Irish poet after Yeats who follows him in broad cultural orientation"; incorporating his identity within a complex web of signifiers, Longley claimed that MacNeice manifested, "a different brand of 'Anglo-Irish' hybridization, his half-way house between the conditions of Anglo-Irishman and Ulster Protestant". (28) By singling out MacNeice as heir to Yeats in "broad cultural orientation", Longley defers to the concept of an exemplary literary 'aristocracy'. Arguably, this is ironic beside her subsequent complaint that the *Field Day Anthology* "derives from arrested politics", that it "established its own master-version of history quite conventionally".²⁴

As was the case with Longley's abrasive response to Field Day, in 1984 Damian Smyth's review of the "second wave" of Field Day Pamphlets, "Stick to the twenty-six, and rhyme, Seamus Deane, Seamus Deane", provided evidence that ancestral 'sour grapes' were exacerbating Ireland's critical debates. Smyth suggested that Field Day pamphleteers reasoned within exclusivist parameters, and archly regretted that the entire project

²⁴ E. Longley, Introduction, *The Living Stream*, (1994).

indicated that, "the first flowering of Catholic intellect in Ireland, north or south, is a bitter plant indeed". Smyth continued:

At the core of Deane's thought is an overwhelming sectarianism. For Ascendancy read Protestant; for Irish, read Catholic. If Shaw, Parnell, Yeats, Hyde and Lyons had been Catholic, then Deane's argument would be even more meaningless than it is. As he sees it, because they were Protestant, they were not Irish and so their immense contribution to this country is deemed an alien one....

...The rich Protestant contribution to Irish culture is attacked as theft....

...The most destructive part of these pamphlets is their common denial of responsibility, a thing Yeats was not afraid of. The responsibility is shuffled off eighty, ninety or a hundred years ago, at a time when Irish intellectuals should be examining their consciences, asking why the revolution in hearts and minds failed so disastrously in our own time.²⁵

When it is considered beside the evidence of Longley's unease at Trinity's 'declining' influence and attempts to assert continuity in the Anglo-Irish literary tradition, Smyth's disavowal of a partisan Catholic intellectual harvest and impassioned advocacy of "the rich Protestant contribution to Irish culture" once again highlights the controversial role of Irish universities in sponsoring critical dialogues schooled to opposing cultural views.

Compared to Smyth's astringent, topical challenge to Field Day, in 1996 Gerald Dawe's analysis of the Protestant writer's 'place' in Ireland is

²⁵D. Smyth, *North*, 3, (October 1984), 19. Smyth reviewed, R. Kearney, "Myth and Motherland" (1984), D. Kiberd, "Anglo-Irish Attitudes" (1984), and S. Deane, "Heroic Styles : the tradition of an idea" (1984).

prosaic. Discussing the influence of “inheritance” on the “abstract creative moment”, Dawe explained:

I ... use[ing] the terms ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ in the sense that they distinguish the access a writer may or may not have in Ireland to mythic and symbolic realities....

...It is an access which was more limited in the Protestant tradition ... the Protestant tradition in Ireland seemed less compatible to the artistic imagination and consequently ‘Protestant’ writers like Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Hewitt made the constructing of an imaginative inheritance a substantial part of their literary identity and ambition, a priority which they, as individuals but in common, began ‘from scratch’....

...[Writers] like Fiacca ... write out of the tradition in which a poem like ‘Dark Rosaleen’ would have the implicit emotional resonance of an immediately recognisable nostalgia of cherished ideals. Such a tradition still exists in Ireland despite the attempts of political or cultural ‘revisionists’ to disarm it.²⁶

Dawe’s study outlines an endemic ‘Protestant’ literary angst rooted in a sense of exclusion and, by elision, renders Ireland’s “implicit emotional resonances” Catholic and womanly. Ironically, in 1996 Dawe’s emphasis reinforces the aberrant binaries *Across a Roaring Hill* was designed to circumvent in 1985. As is the case with Longley’s and Smyth’s challenges to Field Day, Dawe’s comments reveal the malign influence of an attritional war. Specifically, in 1996 Dawe’s argument runs counter to that which he put forward nine years earlier in 1987 in “Poetry”. As A. Bradley has commented, “literature in modern Ireland has traditionally been preoccupied with the question of cultural identity and has borne much of

²⁶ G. Dawe, *Against Piety*, (1996), 23.

the burden of social and political expression".²⁷ Similarly, observing that, Ireland "*is* a sectarian place" [Dawe's emphasis], Dawe continued:

There is no use pretending that we can stand above it all in some kind of pristine, theoretically-immaculate and admirable order, disdainful of the sick world with which the poor ordinary misfortunates must cope as best they can. The imagination, literary or 'non-verbal', flounders in such thin air and as for the critical intelligence, it thrives on reality too, not the ideal. It is only when critics, as now start to pore over the various cultural ideals on offer that the complex difficulties in relating 'art' to its society become mined with political intentions and transcendental requirements. If this means that History is opened up ... and we can all see and learn more about our common past, then we have clearly benefited ... To enlist [poetry] in some intellectual or cultural battle makes for a poetry of national service. But to explore imaginatively and critically how others see themselves (as 'Protestants' or 'Catholics' as 'British' or 'Irish') caught between their lives now and how they imagine them to be, does not mean acquiescing in these terms of self-awareness. It simply means facing up to reality and how some people have perceived this as writers from a particular background during this century in different parts of our country.²⁸

Writing here in 1987, Dawe contends there is a critical necessity to accept the writer's perceptions of 'self' and 'reality'. Conversely, in 1996 he considers a discrete, illustrative list of Protestant artists, Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Hewitt, and interprets them as having uniformly perceived themselves barred from Ireland's "mythic and symbolic realities" and compelled to carve out an "imaginative inheritance ... 'from scratch'". Ironically, having arbitrarily reduced the "various cultural ideals on offer"

²⁷ A. Bradley, "Literature and culture in the North of Ireland", M. Kennelly, ed., *Cultural Context and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature*, (1988), 36.

²⁸ G. Dawe, "Poetry", *Linen Hall Review*, 4 1, (Spring 1987), 32.

to, and indeed withheld from the Irish Protestant writer, Dawe then pleads a “special case [for] Irish Protestantism and its literary consequences”.

Problematically, “mythic and symbolic realities” are amorphous concepts which are formed, in Dawe’s words, from “those clichés of history through which poetry is both written and read in Ireland”.²⁹ Liam de Paor regrets that Protestants, “however worthy, loyal and patriotic” are overwhelmingly perceived by Catholic Ireland as “still not quite the real thing, not truly Irish, not genuinely indigenous, not *echt*-Gaelic”.³⁰ De Paor’s comments illustrate the insidious notion, which Dawe appears to succumb to in 1996, that Protestant art emerges from a ‘lesser’, or marginalised Irish culture therefore requires positive critical discrimination. Whereas in 1987, Dawe had resisted “a poetry of national service”, advocated purgative critical analyses aimed at accepting the writer’s view of “reality” and encouraged responsibility to “expose political intentions and transcendental requirements”, in 1996 he homogenizes the “imaginative inheritances” of Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Hewitt into singular, orphaned talent and, paradoxically, elevates the poet to ‘truth-seeker’:

The phenomenon of language in Ireland takes us back to the semantics of strife and the seeds of historical disaffection which continue to threaten the individual imagination by overshadowing the range and validity of its perceptions. In this confrontation, brief and secretive and

²⁹ G. Dawe, *Against Piety*, (1996) 32.

³⁰ L. de Paor, “The Protestant leaven”, *Irish Times*, 16.08.1984, 10.

arbitrary as it often is, new ways of truth can be found and therein lies the poet's responsibility : something that is outside the literal conventions and orthodoxies of our literary past. (28)

Dawe's argument does not elaborate on the 'scratch' positions assigned to Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Hewitt. Logically, if these writers did indeed revert to 'scratch' they must first have had to obliterate their pasts.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha reflects on models of cultural identity:

To exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus. It is a demand that reaches outward to an external object ... the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy - it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image.
[Bhabha's emphasis] (44-45)

Similarly, Sandy Petrey contends that "all linguistic artefacts must be understood in relation to the sociohistorical context of their production and reception".³¹ There is a powerful symmetry between Bhabha's and Petrey's comments and the evidence of W. B. Yeats' 'The municipal gallery revisited':

³¹ S. Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (1990), 3.

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
 All that we did, all that we said or sang
 Must come from contact with the soil, from that
 Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.³²

Notwithstanding their ancient ancestries, political and philosophical instincts towards, or later desertion of Ireland, Yeats, Synge, Beckett and Hewitt were born to its pre-partition 'soil'. Indeed, Hewitt keenly stressed this aspect of his identity.³³ Interpreted through Bhabha's model of 'identity' and Petrey's theory of the relationship between language and context, Yeats', Synge's, Beckett's and Hewitt's "imaginative inheritances" were not, as Dawe contends, germinated in a hapless coincidence of nothingness and an "abstract creative moment", not limited by exclusion or reactive 'ambition'. As E. Roma comments, writers "do not create words ... have no claim to omniscience".³⁴ Yeats' "imaginative inheritance" had resource in a 'Protestantism' enriched by an Anglo-Catholic romanticism with close affinity to Irish-Catholic romanticism: "Many times man lives and dies / Between his two eternities, / That of race and that of soul, / And ancient Ireland knew it all." ('Under Ben Bulbin').³⁵ Synge usefully

³² W. B. Yeats, A. Martin, ed., *W. B. Yeats : Collected Poems*, (1990), 334-6. In 'The municipal gallery revisited', Yeats refers to Synge as "that rooted man".

³³ See, for example, Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

³⁴ E. Roma, "The scope of the intentional fallacy", D. Newton-De Molina, ed., *On Literary Intention*, (1976), 74.

³⁵ W. B. Yeats, A. Martin, ed., *W. B. Yeats : Collected Poems*, (1990), 341.

enmeshed earthy, irreverent, post-reformation traditions of religious apostasy with what he observed as the actual speech rhythms and customs of the rural Irish. Beckett's independent vision liberated him to pursue a Protestant anti-clericalist instinct toward individual 'salvation' to philosophical heights of absurdity. Exploiting the sophisticated networks of inherited traditions that were their birthrights Yeats, Synge and Beckett powerfully and idiosyncratically engaged with the 'nightmare' of Irish history, saluting their pasts as they rendered them obsolete. Hewitt is incongruous even on Dawe's discrete list. By contrast to Yeats (1865), Synge (1871), and Beckett (1906), who were born in Dublin, Hewitt (1907) was born in Belfast. Although he conceded that having been born "before partition" he was "an Irishman in that way",³⁶ Hewitt was an unreconstructed northerner; his "imaginative inheritance" was not, as Dawe implies, crafted "from scratch" through being excluded from Ireland's "mythic and symbolic realities". Rather, it was scrupulously edited from a personal myth wrought from an ardently Anglophile "nostalgia of cherished ideals".

Hewitt was born in 1907. He was first published in 1928, and his pre and immediately post Second World War mind set reflects the diverse cultural,

³⁶J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

economic and political developments of post-Partition Ireland and a consolidating British influence in Northern Ireland. This is relevant when considering anomalies between Hewitt's pre and post Coventry political visions. In the 1940s and 1950s, for example, Hewitt did not consider it illogical to acknowledge the existence of imperfect "social relations" within 'Ulster', while simultaneously maintaining an exclusive loyalty to an anglophone parent culture. Moreover, Hewitt's career ambitions were not observably influenced by radical socialist ideals. Neither did he, as Edna Longley has implied, espouse 'communist' opinions'.³⁷ Indeed, Hewitt considered it ironic that he had been denied promotion at work because he was a Communist, and insisted that he was "too much of an individualist - 'a Trotskyist'" to become one.³⁸ Writing to John Montague in 1964 Hewitt remarked, "I have never been a Communist ... I should best be described as a Utopian Socialist. This sets my aims beyond the hustle of tomorrow's by-election".³⁹ Although he rejected Communism, Hewitt admitted that he often appropriated the dialectics of Marxism as a "handy if not all-purpose tool".⁴⁰ Together with evidence that Hewitt was inept at communicating

³⁷E. Longley, *The Living Stream*, (1994), 126.

³⁸J. Hewitt, "The family next door", *Threshold*, 23, (Summer 1970), 19, and J. Hewitt quoted in M. Wallace, "A poet and his past", *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.1957.

³⁹J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), John Hewitt Collection, University of Ulster Coleraine. [JHC].

⁴⁰J. Hewitt quoted in G. Watts, "John Hewitt : the nonconformist conscience of Northern Ireland", M.Litt., Trinity College, (1987), 140. In "No rootless colonist" (1972),

'progressive' ideas to "working-class nonconformists" in the 1930s, his claims to have been variously an individualist, 'Trotskyist', Utopian Socialist and Labour Party activist might be interpreted as evidence that he inclined instinctively towards a theoretical rather than a practical socialism.⁴¹ By 1972, however, Hewitt had begun to rationalise his pre Coventry thinking for a contemporary audience. In "No rootless colonist" (1972) he explained:

By the mid-1920s, with the new ministries in gear and the nonentities trooping to the Westminster back benches, it seemed evident that the Unionists were a right-wing offshoot of the British Tory Party who at home fought every election on the border, and that the Nationalists, the representatives of the Catholic minority, were merely obsolete clansmen with old slogans, moving in an irrelevant dream, utterly without the smallest fig-leaf of a social policy.⁴²

Notwithstanding the philosophical defeatism of these comments, the evidence of 'Neither an elegy nor a manifesto' (1972), dedicated to "the people of my province and the rest of Ireland", indicates that by 1972 Hewitt was in an upbeat mood as he prepared to return to Belfast after fifteen years in Coventry.

Hewitt's comment that he was a "branch delegate" at a Labour Party Conference in the 1920s, indicates he was a party member.

⁴¹ J. Hewitt, "Alcc of the Chimney Corner" and "The bitter gourd" (1945), T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 43, 114.

⁴² J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 149.

Patriotism has to do with keeping
 the country in good heart, the community
 ordered with justice and mercy;
 these will enlist loyalty and courage often,
 and sacrifice, sometimes even martyrdom.
 Bear these eventualities in mind also;
 they will concern you forever:
 but, at this moment, bear in mind these dead.⁴³

Arguably, the notion of 'patriotism' invoked in 'Neither an elegy nor a manifesto' was simply the romantic rhetoric of the returning exile, buoyed by his unprecedented success in *The Planter and the Gael* (1970). Specifically, by contrast to the poem's stress on, "justice and mercy; / these will enlist loyalty", "No rootless colonist" is evidence that Hewitt had maintained an implacable resistance to 'Gaelicism' while in Coventry and, moreover, intensified his 'loyalty' to English literature and British political and philosophical traditions:

My mother tongue is English, instrument and tool of my thought and expression; John Ball, the Diggers, the Levellers, the Chartists, Paine, Cobbett, Morris, a strong thread in the fabric of my philosophy, I learned about in English history. There are many others, but these epitomise for me the British democratic tradition. I also draw upon an English literary tradition which includes Marvell, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Clare, as well as the American tradition in English of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Frost, *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* means no less to me than the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, besides, I think Cuchulainn was a very dirty fighter.

In varying degrees these circumstances set me apart from the majority of people in my native country.⁴⁴

⁴³J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 188.

While “No rootless colonist” indicates that Hewitt’s mind set remained conservative, in 1972 he was keenly aware that the complacencies of Northern Ireland’s pre-Troubles status quo were being scrutinised intensely. Poised to return to Belfast in October 1972, and eager to involve himself in its vitalized ‘cultural scene’, Hewitt pre-empted criticism of his effete, pre Coventry political thinking by “taking charge of the [its] interpretation” himself. Accordingly, in “No rootless colonist” (1972) he reinvented his regionalism as a ground-breaking radical initiative designed to create a “meeting place for the two separated communities”.⁴⁵ Diverting attention from his disavowal of “obsolete clansmen” and exclusive devotion to British political traditions, Hewitt explained that he was different from the “majority of people in my native country” because he had inherited a superlative Protestant, specifically English intellectual identity which he insisted was indelibly inscribed in the rhythms of his mother tongue.

⁴⁴ J. Hewitt, “No rootless colonist”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 148. In 1972, Hewitt’s resistance to Irish legends is consistent with his rejection, when Chair of the Literature Committee of the Arts Council in 1976, of a proposal to re issue Samuel Ferguson’s epic, *Congal* (based upon *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Rath* from the Irish historical cycle) See Literature Committee Minutes, Arts Council Northern Ireland, TDS, 27.01.1976, Public Record Office Northern Ireland. [PRONI]. In 1980, *Congal* was edited and reproduced independently by Ian Adamson and the small community-based Pretani Press. This edition was reissued with an introduction by Michael Hall in 1995 by Island Publications, another small community press. These reprints reflect increased interest in ‘ancient’ ‘Ulster’ identities by ‘loyalist’ communities. Arguably this is ironic beside evidence that Hewitt was promoted as an exemplar of cultural exchange and reconciliation.

⁴⁵ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 153.

Moreover, Hewitt's reference to his sense of being "apart from the majority of people in my native country" is artfully imprecise; it might be considered evidence that he also attempted to imply his "ineradicable consciousness of *difference*" from his 'own kind', the Protestant 'majority' within Northern Ireland. If this is accepted, it might be argued that Hewitt astutely dovetailed with the prevailing mood by imagining roots in a superior cultural, intrinsically English Britishness, in the process effectively transforming himself into that curious 'brand' of Northern Irishman preferred by Longley, the 'Anglo-Irish hybrid'. To investigate the substance of Hewitt's validating myth and its significance to critico-cultural politics in the 1970s, it is necessary to deconstruct it.

Introducing *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991), Frank Ormsby remarked that, beyond the 1930s "Hewitt's sense of Ireland and his own corner of it extends and deepens", and that *Freehold* (1939-46) embodied his "more confident sense of absolute inheritance". Ormsby explained that section three of *Freehold*, 'Townland of peace' (1944-46), "opens with a visit to Kilmore, Co. Armagh, one of the homes of Hewitt's Planter forefathers. The journey is partly a search for serenity in time of war ... partly a quest to satisfy 'some need of roots'". Ormsby's comments are instructive. First, they explicitly identify Hewitt as 'other', therefore highlight the central aspect of a personal mythology that facilitated his metamorphosis to cultural icon. By capitalising 'Planter', Ormsby implies

that Hewitt is descended from Englishmen ceded land in the Official Plantation, therefore 'different', not simply from the majority of Irishmen, but also from the majority of Northern Irish Protestants, whose origins are mainly Scottish. Second, Ormsby asserts as a fact that Kilmore is Hewitt's ancestral 'home'. Perhaps this is unsurprising since, in his autobiographical essay, "Planter's gothic", Hewitt claimed to have ancestors there. Alternatively, it might be argued that "Planter's gothic" testifies to Hewitt's remarkable ability to invest snippets of myth with the authority of fact. While Ormsby correctly identified 'Townland of peace' as a significant stepping stone in Hewitt's search for roots, the poem might equally be read, not as a symbol of Hewitt's "confident sense of absolute inheritance", but as a record of the genesis of a purposeful, yet wholly fanciful identification with Armagh.⁴⁶

Characterising Hewitt's biographical, almost confessional style, 'Townland of peace' chronicles an actual event, his wartime visit to John Luke and W. R. Rodgers in County Armagh. The importance of the journey to Hewitt is indicated by the contrasting perspectives in 'Conacre' (1943) and 'Townland of peace' (1944-46). In 'Conacre', Hewitt subverts the symbolism of his title by disparaging the "tweed-bright poet drunk in

⁴⁶ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC.

pastoral or morris-dances in the legion hall” and asserting municipal sensibilities:

I sleep above a flagged resounding street,
and men from shops deliver all I eat.
.....
You would escape from brick but not too far.
You want the hill at hand familiar,
the punctual packet and the telephone,
that you may not be lonely when alone.
.....
I nod assent, no dusty pioneer
complaining that the road has come too near.⁴⁷

Two years later in 1945 in “The bitter gourd”, Hewitt insisted that the Ulster writer must be a “rooted man”. Hewitt explained:

I do not mean that a writer ought to live and die in the house of his fathers. What I do mean is that he ought to feel that he belongs to a recognisable focus in place and time. How he assures himself of that feeling is his own affair. But I believe he must have it. And with it, he must have ancestors. Not just of the blood, but of the emotions, of the quality and slant of mind. He must know where he comes from and where he is: otherwise how can he tell where he wishes to go?⁴⁸

Hewitt’s phrase, “how he assures himself of that feeling is his own affair”, indicates that, despite the sturdy metropolitan sensibility evoked in ‘Conacre’(1943), by 1945 he had begun to perceive ‘identity’ as a pliant mythology. In 1948, the evidence of ‘On the use of dialect words’ indicates

⁴⁷ J. Hewitt, ‘Conacre’, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 3.

⁴⁸ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 115-116.

that by then the certainties of 'Conacre' had receded yet further before
Hewitt's crystallising myth.

I pluck words out of the speech of countrymen,
not for their far-fetched joy or oddity,
found-objects mounted for the gallery
and after tipped back in the bin again,
not that I clutch them as an alien
holds to the seal or stamp that marks him free
to blunder in and rock the family
to mocking laughter, grief tapped now and then.

But somewhere in the shifting tides my heart
scarce holds from overlapping, there are things
which need such names to draw them to the light;
precision speeds my aim, and so outstart
from steaming flats the evidence of wings
and a deep world emerging into sight.⁴⁹

Crucially, Hewitt's search for linguistic roots in 'On the use of dialect words' coincided with the beginning of his academic interest in the 'rhyming weavers'. The title of the poem posits a didactic, rather than an emotional purpose. While in 'The ram's horn' (1949) Hewitt declared, "I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me:", six months later in 'O country people', he confessed his sense of alienation from country folk:

O country people, you of the hill farms,
huddled so in darkness I cannot tell
whether the light across the glen is a star,

⁴⁹ J. Hewitt, 'On the use of dialect words', F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 434.

or the bright lamp spilling over the sill,
 I would be neighbourly, would come to terms
 with your existence, but you are so far;
 there is a wide bog between us, a high wall.
 I've tried to learn the smaller parts of speech
 in your slow language, but my thoughts need more
 flexible shapes to move in, if I am to reach
 into the hearth's red heart across the half-door.⁵⁰

In 1950, Hewitt conveyed a similar detachment in 'Fame': "Most of these names and deeds were strange to me / who have no lease on this folk memory". In 1953 in "Planter's gothic", he admitted his need to adopt a "dialect of my own devising for use when talking to country people", while in 1976 he told a Miss Craig that, "I have a strong sense of my non-involvement in the country life of my poems".⁵¹

Evidence that Hewitt lacked empathy for "country life" through 'Conacre' in 1943 to his remarks to Miss Craig in 1976, indicates that his claim to rural Armagh as his "corner of the universe" in 'Townland of peace' (which he put together between 1944 and 1946) is worth closer scrutiny. In particular, it emphasises the shift in focus between Hewitt's portrayal of himself as a dedicated city man in 'Conacre', and his claim to the gravestone histories of Armagh Hewitts as the essential fabric of his

⁵⁰ J. Hewitt, 'O country ppeople', F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 72.

⁵¹ J. Hewitt to Miss Craig, TLS, 17.04.1976. PRONI.

emotional centre in 'Townland of peace'. In the first section of 'Townland of peace', published in October 1944, Hewitt writes:

Once in a showery summer, sick of war,
 I strode the roads that slanted to Kilmore,
 that church-topped mound where half the tombstones wear
 my people's name; some notion drew me there,
 illogical, but not to be ignored
 some need of roots saluted, some sought word
 that might give strength and sense to my slack rein,
 by this directed, not to lose again
 the line and compass so my head and heart
 no longer plunge and tug to drag apart.

.....

Somehow that easy journey, every minute,
 and every field and face and word within it,
 not to be split or shredded line by line
 to smooth equations easy to define,
 has not the random shape of accident,
 but the warm logic of a testament
 by which since then my better moments move,
 assured of certainties I need not prove.

Now and for ever through the change-rocked years,
 I know my corner in the universe;
 my corner, this small region limited
 in space by sea, in the time by my own dead,
 who are its compost,⁵²

Despite Hewitt's emphasis in 'Townland of peace' (1944-46), he was not drawn to Armagh by an amorphous romantic "notion". Rather, he went there initially simply because he was invited to do so by John Luke in

⁵² J. Hewitt, 'Townland of Peace', F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 379.

Summer 1943. Tellingly, Hewitt later recalled that this visit “proved a significant venture - the whole episode came out first as ‘Townland of peace’ in blank verse”.⁵³ The poem records that Hewitt extended his stay by calling on W. R. Rodgers, “the poet-parson” who had recently achieved fame with *Awake! And Other Poems* (1940).⁵⁴ In context, Luke and Rodgers were more successful than Hewitt; notably he took extracts of *Freehold* to Rodgers’ parsonage to read aloud and invite a ‘verdict’.⁵⁵ Given his chameleonic qualities, it is conceivable that this experience encouraged a sense of ‘coterie’ in Hewitt, prompting him to temporarily abandon his city persona. The chronology is illuminating. In April 1943, Hewitt asserted his affinity with city life in ‘Conacre’; the following August he visited Armagh; in the section of ‘Townland of peace’ published in *The Bell* in October 1944, he claimed to have found his roots in rural, English planted Armagh; and in 1945 Hewitt insisted the writer should be a “rooted man”. Significantly, in 1950 the title of ‘Sunset over Glenaan’ symbolised Hewitt’s emotional withdrawal from Antrim and its predominantly ‘Ulster Scots’ orientated cultures. Glenaan is a small Antrim townland; the poem considers the “dull prosperity” of the area’s “island Planter folk”. Halfway

⁵³ J. Hewitt, *John Luke (1906-1975)*, (1978), 49-50.

⁵⁴ Rodgers was minister of Cloveneden Presbyterian Church in Loughgall. Luke was staying at Knappagh.

⁵⁵ R. McFadden recalls being present at one such reading. Interview with S. Ferris, Belfast, July, 1966.

through, Hewitt halts his reverie; using rank shift to emphasise “also”, he asserts difference and, together with his use of the English archaism “shew”, signals a conscious turning away from Antrim towards the “legendary air” of the Armagh church yards and the “distinctive features” of mid-Ulster “Anglo-Irish”:⁵⁶

My breed is Planter also. I can shew
the grey and crooked headstones row on row
in a rich country mastered long ago
by stubborn farmers from across the sea,
whose minds and hands were rich in husbandry,
and who, when their slow blood was running thin,
crowded in towns for warmth, and bred me in
the clay-red city with the white horse on the wall,
the jangling steeples, and the green-domed hall.

Inheritor of these, I also share
the nature of this legendary air,
reaching a peace and speech I do not find
familiarily among my kin and kind.⁵⁷

When juxtaposed with ‘Townland of peace’, which indicates that from 1944 Hewitt had begun to identify imaginatively with County Armagh, ‘Sunset over Glenaan’ is evidence that by 1950 he was beginning, in Dawe’s and Longley’s words, “to transform the narrowing phrase ‘my own kind’”. Arguably, this process was accelerated when Hewitt’s progress within

⁵⁶ In *Concise Ulster Dictionary*, (1996), 255, C. I. Macafee distinguishes between the educated Elizabethan English of 17c Planters “actually granted land”, and the regional dialects of “soldiers and servants” and subsequent migrants.

⁵⁷ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 112-114.

Northern Ireland's 'establishment' halted in September 1952. Reacting, perhaps, in 1953 in 'Rite, Lubitavish, Glenaan' he uncharacteristically declared: "I am of the Irishry / by nurture and by birth/ So let no patriot decry / or Kelt dispute my claim / for I have found the faith was here / before Saint Patrick came".⁵⁸ As Hewitt's frustration intensified, so did his disenchantment with his 'own kind' and, by 1953, he had determined to "set up his [my] own mythology".⁵⁹ There is evidence to suggest that he simultaneously began to distance himself from putative Scottish ancestors.

In the 1940s, Hewitt readily acknowledged Scots family links. In "Poetry and you" (1948) he claimed he could decipher the Ulster-Scots dialect, "thanks to my mother who ... still carries her mother's phrases on her tongue".⁶⁰ In 1949, Hewitt interpreted Scottish regionalism as an attempt to overthrow "the dictatorship of London", and judged this relevant to 'Ulster', "not only because of our own close racial and economic ties with Scotland, but because much of our own tradition has the same roots".⁶¹ By contrast, in 1953, one year after his career stalled and the same year he threw in his lot with the "Irishry" in 'Rite, Lubitavish, Glenaan', Hewitt

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁹ J. Hewitt, "Planter's gothic", T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 28.

⁶⁰ J. Hewitt, *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2, 8, (May 1948), 21-22.

⁶¹ J. Hewitt, "The Scottish renaissance by Maurice Lindsay", *Poetry Ireland*, 5, (April 1949), 25-27.

irritably declared that he “resent[ed] the imprecise publicists who chatter glibly of ‘The Ulster Scots’ or, in the deplorable American phrase, ‘The Scotch-Irish’, as if every Ulster Protestant must necessarily be of Scottish descent”.⁶² It is uncertain if Hewitt wanted to distance himself from pejorative connotations in the tag “Scotch-Irish”, or merely considered it American and careless.⁶³ Whichever is the case, by 1953 Hewitt had clearly begun to smooth out inconsistencies between the ‘identity’ he desired and his putative Scottish ancestry as a means of dissociating himself from the cultural origins of the majority of Northern Protestants. Specifically, in “Planter’s gothic” (1953) Hewitt insisted that his “reading aloud of Scots [was] poor”, that his accent was “standard Ulster-English”, and glossed his grandfather’s considerable knowledge of Robert Burns:

Since Armagh was an English-planted area, and very little vernacular verse was written in that county, I take it that John’s knowledge and enthusiasm was a result of his years of living in Dumbarton Road and hearing the talkers on Glasgow Green.

“Planter’s gothic” is evidence that by 1953 Hewitt’s embryonic romance with “English-planted” Armagh, which he had begun in the 1940s, had

⁶² J. Hewitt, “Planter’s gothic”, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 8.

⁶³ In “Not just a typographical error : the origin of Scotch-Irish explained”, *Causeway*, 1, (Winter 1994), 32-35, S. Ichkringill analyses the origin of the term “Scotch-Irish” and its largely negative association with Protestant migrants to the United States.

burgeoned into a distinctive personal history. Writing under the pseudonym, Howard, Hewitt explained:

The Howards ... stem from County Armagh. The name is on county hearth-rolls of 1610. There are other Irish Howards outside Ulster, but they are, I am sure, Cromwellian upstarts....

...The Armagh Howards came from the neighbourhood of Kilmore ... Half the headstones in the little churchyard carry [the name]. It is always something of a shock to discover your name lettered on a grave slab or a stone; but to see it again and again sets up strange oscillations of identity, and you have to grip hard to keep it from slipping away....

...These Howards came over most likely as camp followers of some of the Devon or Somerset planters whose traditions still blossom every May in the broad orchards of Armagh and the Loughshore. So far as I know, they were Episcopalian, with an odd secession, now and then, to the Society of Friends or the Methodists. I can remember my grandfather telling me of Quaker kinsmen over by Rich Hill.

While Hewitt's 'history' reveals his anxiety to insinuate distance between his myth and the Cromwellian invasions of Ireland, it clearly identifies his ancestors as English in race and religion. Notably, in a contemporary newspaper article, Hewitt narrowly equated English culture with 'civilisation', a favoured word, applauding William Allingham as being "born of English planter stock" and "one of the minor glories of nineteenth century poetry".⁶⁴ Illustrating his enduring fascination with 'Englishness', many years later Hewitt compared Allingham to Samuel Ferguson, and

⁶⁴ J. Hewitt, "We are marking our place in literature", *Belfast Telegraph*, 02.12.1953, 8.

remarked that the latter is of “Scots planter stock”, “but [the former] is of English family ... a most civilised man”.⁶⁵

“Planter’s gothic” is evidence that by 1953 Hewitt had wholeheartedly embraced ‘Englishness’ as a mask to avoid being associated with the dour Calvinism of the “wicked Henry Cooke”, the ragged offspring of Lowland Scots covenanters, and the vulgar pretensions of the Belfast city officials who had, he believed, unjustly denied him the Directorship of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery.⁶⁶ Interviewed by Martin Wallace just prior to moving to Coventry in 1957, Hewitt confidently declared that, “beyond his father [there] are the forebears from the parish of Kilmore” in that “English planted county, Armagh”.⁶⁷ Writing to Montague seven years later in 1964, Hewitt stated that his “own Planter people ... arrived in Armagh about 1600”. There is evidence that Hewitt had continued to develop his myth in exile. By contrast to 1953, when he had claimed to be “most likely” descended from “Devon or Somerset planters”, in “Planter’s gothic” Hewitt now explained:

There is ... the odd coincidence that Hewitt is an old Coventry name. One John Hewitt was a gluttonous Mayor in the 18th century - his family moved to Ireland and became the noble house of Lifford, but my

⁶⁵ J. Hewitt, “Davis, Mangan, Ferguson”, BBC Radio Ulster, 19.10.1974.

⁶⁶ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964), JHC. Written in Coventry, ‘The Mainland’ declares: “the story should have ended, / the island now a nation, its people one; / but legends of the mainland still persist / in hearthside talk and rags of balladry”.

⁶⁷ J. Hewitt quoted in M. Wallace, “A poet and his past”, *Belfast Telegraph*, 15.03.57.

forbears [*sic*] had more than a century's start in the process of becoming naturalised. Another John Hewitt in the 14th century was employed by the Council in keeping householders up to scratch with their outside repairs. Best of all, in the mid sixteenth century, John Hewitt was painter of scenery and props for the local Miracle Plays, of which Coventry had a famous cycle. So I have tentatively extended my personal myth and imagined that one of the painter's sons joined the ragged army of the Big Undertakers and followed them into County Armagh, there to become my ancestor, and in a strange way I, or part of me has come home. You see I am forever rationalising my circumstances, a romantic heart.⁶⁸

Just as he had switched affinity from town to country after visiting John Luke in Armagh in the 1940s, once in Coventry Hewitt characteristically abandoned his earlier claim in "Planter's gothic" that he had ancestors in "Devon or Somerset" and relocated his 'forebears' in Warwickshire. Further exposing his inveterate tendency to spin webs of fancy with illusions of fact, he notes a common occurrence of Hewitts in Coventry, and traces the fortunes of an actual English 'planter'. Crucially, Hewitt subtly implies that his own, signally unidentified ancestor preceded this migrant to Ireland's shores by a century. Writing to the Catholic Montague, Hewitt is careful to 'imagine' he went as an artisan, not a Cromwellian.

Hewitt continued to refine his myth of being descended from English 'planters'. By 1970, when he was interviewed for radio by Rósín McAuley, Hewitt was able to stoutly announce that he was "a planter who knows that my people came from England three or four hundred years ago ... Hewitt is

⁶⁸ J. Hewitt to J. Montague, TLU, (Spring 1964). JHC.

an English name". Echoing his private comments to Montague six years earlier, Hewitt added that, after seeing the name 'Hewitt' carved on gravestones in Warwickshire he had "realised [he] had a connection with this part of the world".⁶⁹ Notably, by 1970 Hewitt had carefully edited his 'history' to address the deteriorating situation in Northern Ireland; embellishing his claim to be "an English man planted in Ireland", he explained that, since his 'tradition' was the "English radical tradition, Fox, Paine, etc", he could not, therefore, "identify with Irish national leaders". Arguably, this is evidence that Hewitt sought to pre-empt criticism of his disregard of romantic Irish nationalism, and to create a smokescreen to avoid having to radically engage with the rights and, or wrongs of contemporary nationalist ferment. If this view is accepted, it subverts Dawe's assertion that Hewitt carved his identity in reaction to a sense of being excluded from Ireland's 'myths' and 'symbols'. Alternatively, the McAuley interview was designed to promote *The Planter and the Gael* in November 1970. Perhaps Hewitt was being deliberately provocative to invite publicity; his remarks are notably inconsistent with 'An Ulsterman' (1969) written just a year earlier:

This is my country. If my people came
from England here four centuries ago,
the only trace that's left is in my name.

⁶⁹ J. Hewitt interviewed by R. McAuley in "John Hewitt, Ulster poet in Coventry", BBC Radio Four Northern Ireland, 1.10.1970.

Kilmore, Armagh, no other sod can show
the weathered stone of our first burying.
.....

this is my country, never disavowed.⁷⁰

Against this, Hewitt was often inconsistent. Responding to his claim be an “English man planted in Ireland”, McAuley asked Hewitt if he considered still valid A. E.’s remark - made in 1917 - that “many Ulster people still regard themselves as settlers ... openly saying they were more akin to England than to Ireland and uninfluenced almost entirely by the intellectual and cultural traditions of Ireland”. Given his earlier comments, Hewitt rather puzzlingly replied, “yes, it is still valid for a great many people, that is the trouble”.

Hewitt’s anomalous remarks in the McAuley interview, which simultaneously acknowledged the undesirability of maintaining a ‘settler mentality’ and, paradoxically, asserted ‘Englishness’, are to some extent reconciled when they are juxtaposed with his comment in “No rootless colonist” that his intellectual loyalties set him “apart from the majority of people” in Ireland.⁷¹ Notably, by 1972, when “No rootless colonist” was published, Hewitt’s insistence on being ‘different’ from the majority of Protestants in the North had brought him unprecedented attention and he

⁷⁰ J. Hewitt, F. Ormsby, ed., *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991), 132.

⁷¹ J. Hewitt, T. Clyde, ed., *Ancestral Voices*, (1987), 148.

was now a focus for cultural critics. Specifically, taking its title from the closing line of 'The colony', a contemporary *Irish Times* editorial, "Not outcast on the world", acclaimed Hewitt as the 'laureate' of the North. Responding positively to the potential of British Prime Minister Edward Heath's 1972 initiative to end sectarian violence, the editor declared:

People who have been three years and more on this island are not Planters - not unless they pin that label on themselves. Those who have felt that way have now a chance to prove that they are in their right place.

.....

In the words of their own poet, John Hewitt, the Northern majority will be able to say: 'We would be strangers in the Capitol: / This is our country also, no-where else: / And we shall not be outcast on the world.'⁷²

Two years later in 1974, Hewitt participated in the *Irish Times* symposium, "The clash of identities". By then he had formulated and considerably refined his distinctive hierarchy of loyalties. The symposium explored problems of identity and the Northern Irish conflict; it was chaired by Eavan Boland and participants included three Irish writers, one delegate from Sinn Fein, and three from the Ulster Defence Association. Hewitt exploited this highly politicized public forum and provided an ironic, yet

⁷²Editorial, "Not outcast on the world", *Irish Times*, 25.03.1972. After Bloody Sunday (January 1972), British Prime Minister Edward Heath began talks with the Irish and Northern Irish Governments; Stormont was prorogued and William Whitelaw introduced as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The *Irish Times* interpreted the Heath initiative as a sign that the British government was preparing to challenge Unionist hegemony in Northern Ireland.

oddly echoic counterpoint to the *Irish Times* editorial in 1972, when he firmly “pin[ned] the Planter label on himself”:

I am an Ulsterman of planter stock. I was born in the island of Ireland, so secondarily I’m an Irishman. I was born in the British archipelago and English is my native tongue, so I am British. The British archipelago are offshore islands to the continent of Europe, so I’m European. This is my hierarchy of values and as far as I’m concerned, anyone who omits one step in that sequence of values is falsifying the situation.⁷³

As John Osmond has commented, it is significant that “Hewitt, who gave these matters more thought than most, elided English into British in this statement”.⁷⁴ Having outlined his hierarchy of identities, Hewitt restated the claim he had first issued four years earlier in the McAuley interview: “my name is an English name. The Hewitts came, I believe, from the Midlands to County Armagh in the seventeenth century”.

In the McAuley interview and *Irish Times* symposium, Hewitt’s designation of ‘Hewitt’ as an English name exposes his tendency to romanticise. Specifically, in *Book of Ulster Surnames* (1988), R. Bell reveals that the name ‘Hewitt’ can be either English or Scottish in origin and, moreover, that it is as common in Antrim as Hewitt claimed it was in Armagh.⁷⁵ Following on this, there is no indication that Hewitt initiated a

⁷³ J. Hewitt quoted in E. Boland, “The clash of identities - II”, *Irish Times*, 04.04.1974, 14.

⁷⁴ J. Osmond, *The Divided Kingdom*, (1988), 120.

⁷⁵ R. Bell, *Book of Ulster Surnames*, (1988).

formal genealogical search. In 1976, for example, two years after the *Irish Times* symposium, Hewitt informed a Mr. Love that while he had recently gleaned a "point or two" about his ancestors from a local cemetery he regretted not quizzing his grandfather about them "more thoroughly than he did". Mr. Love, related to Hewitt but living in Canada, had requested details of their family history. Responding, Hewitt attached a crude genealogy which tracked relatives to 1839; like his intention in "Planter's gothic", this is evidence that he attempted autobiography not fiction.

Hewitt summarised his family history as follows:

So far as I can judge the Hewitt's probably came from Warwickshire. The surname has been common in Coventry since the fourteenth century and waves of colonists came from thence to settle in Co. Armagh in what we call The Plantation of Ulster in the early 16c. Hewitts are listed on Hearth Rolls there from 1620.*

The evidence of the Love letter is particularly interesting; as a private communication to a distant relative it indicates that Hewitt, without recourse to documentary proof, continued to refine and propagate - perhaps even began to believe - the myth that he was descended from English Planters.

To analyse the purpose of Hewitt's myth-making, it is imperative to investigate the substance of his claim to be an "English man planted in

*J Hewitt to Mr. Love, ALS, (c1976), JHC.

Ireland". In "Planter's gothic" and in the Love letter, Hewitt variously states that his family name is listed on Armagh "county Hearth Rolls" in 1610 and 1620 respectively; in 1985 he told Ketzal Levine that there were Hewitts on the Hearth Rolls in "1610 or 1620".⁷ There appears to be no evidence to support Hewitt's claims. Hearth Money Rolls did not exist before the 1660s, and no alternative, relevant genealogical source is accessible.⁸ Hewitt's neglect of detail is surprising given the evidence of 'Orchard country' (1978). Characterising Hewitt's insistently biographical style and, paradoxically, his obsessive urge to mythicize, the poem reflects on his paternal grandfather. By contrast to 1953, when John Hewitt senior appears in "Planter's gothic" as a Burns devotee exuding lively tales from "Glasgow Green", twenty five years later in 'Orchard country' he has metamorphosed into a man of particular local substance.

When my grandfather came to live with us
 my past expanded, for he proffered me,
 his lively mind so thronged and populous,
 an open door to our own history.
 That Armagh orchard country. Yea and Nay

⁷ K. Levine, "A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent", *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

⁸ Starting dates for counties vary. The only extant record for 1610, etc., appears to be the Muster Roll listing fighting men. Since, aside from 'Orchard country' Hewitt refers specifically to the Hearth Rolls three times, it is unlikely he confused the two. The Church of Ireland, the only other genealogical source, was the state church until 1871. Kilmore Church of Ireland records begin in 1789. Earlier records, including those for Richhill were stored in Dublin and lost during the Civil War in 1922. The earliest Wesleyan records available begin 1815; Kilmore Primitive Wesleyan, 1815, Richhill Methodist, 1815. Quakers settled in Ulster in the mid seventeenth century and did not appear in official records as early as 1610. See J. G. Ryan, *Irish Records*, 1988.

of grave believers....

.....

...How in those Planter lands
our name is hearth-rolled. Generation, place,
he gave you foothold in the human race.

'Orchard country' is evidence that by the late 1970s Hewitt had indeed internalised his 'English planter' identity.

Introducing *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* in 1991, Frank Ormsby described Hewitt as a 'Planter' from Kilmore. Ormsby contended that in the final part of *Freehold*, 'The glittering sod' (1946), Hewitt "speaks ... more as the proud representative of a vital tradition than on his own behalf". Ormsby's comments testify to Hewitt's considerable success in projecting his myth, and also to a widespread failure to challenge it. While Ormsby's note that 'The glittering sod' emphasises "the pioneering work of the Planters" is prescient, it equally diverts scrutiny from Hewitt's wholly quixotic identification with Armagh, and the "vital tradition" he created entirely in his own image. Further, there is overwhelming evidence that Hewitt had Scottish ancestry.⁷⁹ As noted above, in his pre Coventry days

⁷⁹The draft genealogy attached to the Love letter, which indicates that Hewitt was unable to trace his family in Ireland beyond 1839, is interesting beside Adams' note that by then, "most of Ulster was wholly or partly of Scots origin". Specifically, this might be interpreted as corroborating evidence of Hewitt's Scots ancestry. See "Ulster as a distinct dialect area", *Ulster Folklife*, 3, 1, (1957), 61-73. Introducing, *A Concise Ulster Dictionary*, (1996), Macafee notes that most migrants to Northern Ireland were Scots (6:1), that many of the early English settlers sold out. See also, "Planter's gothic" (1953), where Hewitt discusses his family's links with Scotland, although he subtly qualifies these. Further anecdotal evidence is contained in Hewitt's essays, "What is poetry", *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2, 9, (June 1948), 19-20, "Programme for poetry", *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2 10, (July 1948), 14-16, "Poetry and you", *Ulster Young Farmer*, 2 8, (May 1948), 21-22, "True to our thought and speech", *Ulster Young Farmer*, 3 1, (October

Hewitt made several references to his mother's gleaning of 'Scots phrases' from his grandmother, used distinctive kinship metaphors to connect Scots traditions and "our own", and outlined an extended family history of repeated journeyings to and from Scotland in "Planter's gothic" (1953). Whilst in Coventry, however, Hewitt sedulously cultivated an "English" persona, thereby distancing himself from the Scots origins of most Northern Irish Protestants. Although he occasionally allowed a "touch of tartan" to colour his writing after returning to Belfast, most notably in the autobiographical sequence of poems that included, 'Scottish interlude' (1978), 'My father's voice' (1978) and 'Jenny Geddes' (1978), apart from the odd unguarded remark, Hewitt single-mindedly honed his public image as an Ulsterman of superlative English 'Planter stock'.

Writing privately to Montague in 1964, Hewitt confessed that his imaginative attachment to 'planter stock' was purely romantic. By 1977, Hewitt was enjoying celebrity status within the North's small literary scene; in a context of almost universal condemnation of its 'oppressive' Protestantism, Hewitt declared that he "preferred to be called a 'Planter' rather than a 'Protestant' as 'the meaning of the latter is not reflected in the attitudes of those who assume the name'".⁸⁰ By 1980, at age seventy three,

1948), and "The Scottish renaissance by Maurice Lindsay", *Poetry Ireland*, 5, (April 1949), 25-27.

⁸⁰ J. Hewitt quoted in R. Johnstone, "John Hewitt : a Protestant atheist", *Fortnight*, 157, (November 1977), 5-6.

Hewitt had come to be regarded locally as something of an elder statesman. Interviewed by Timothy Kearney, he admitted that his planter identity had been a political construct designed by him to educate rather than fulfil a romantic impulse. Critically, when Kearney asked Hewitt if the term ‘planter’ hindered rather than helped the “accurate articulation” of his identity as a Northern poet, Hewitt replied:

I won’t say [it helps] because in the community I come from we never call ourselves the planters ... By calling myself a planter I make the admission that my people began to colonize. But when I make that recognition I am more acceptable to the Gael because I let him know where I stand.⁸¹

Potentially, Hewitt’s efforts were dangerously counter-productive. As the evidence of Ormsby’s identifying him a Planter from Kilmore when introducing *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991) implies, in a bitter sectarian context they encouraged an insidious, reactionary tendency to equate all twentieth century Protestants with the Official Plantation three hundred years before. Moreover, Ormsby’s follow on remark that, the “continuities of Hewitt’s philosophy” found a, “natural home in the

⁸¹ J. Hewitt quoted in T. Kearney, “Beyond the Planter and the Gael”, (1980), CBIS, 4, 2, (1980), 722. In conversation, John Dunlop, who is author of *A Precarious Belonging* (1995) and a former Presbyterian Moderator, could not recall any Protestant styling himself ‘planter’. Interview with S. Ferris, John Hewitt International Summer School, 2 August, 1966.

Midlands of England”, might be construed as an antipathetic reference to Hewitt’s putative racial origins.⁸²

Whether this is so, interviewed by Levine in 1985, Hewitt again displayed his roguish ability to obscure myth with fact and confound the observer. Seemingly reluctant to let go of the identity he had honed over forty years, he first informed Levine that he was descended from actual ancestors with the “English name”, Hewitt, who settled as planters in Armagh in the seventeenth century, then immediately confessed that his ‘myth’ was a pure fiction.

I decided [the Coventry Hewitts] were my ancestors. I’ve no evidence that they were but as most people live by myths, that’s my myth, that my ancestors came from the midlands of England over to the North of Ireland.⁸³

Hewitt’s relinquishment of his ‘planter’ identity in 1985 leads full circle to the question of just who are his ‘own kind’. Ormsby writes, “much of [Hewitt’s] poetry is troubled into utterance by the tensions and paradoxes of a particular fractured culture; he attempts more comprehensively than any other Irish poet to define that culture and in doing so transcends the particulars”.⁸⁴ Considered beside evidence that Hewitt whimsically

⁸²F. Ormsby, Introduction, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991).

⁸³J. Hewitt quoted in K. Levine, “A tree of identities, a tradition of dissent”, *Fortnight*, 213, (February 1985), 16-17.

⁸⁴F. Ormsby, Introduction, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, (1991).

constructed a kaleidoscopic, Anglocentric identity, and that he methodically adapted it to significant moments in his, and his country's history, Ormsby's remark understates Hewitt's case.

Specifically, in the 1970s Hewitt achieved fame by reinventing himself as a prophetic cultural missionary, persecuted radical socialist, secular dissenter and Northern heir to a superior, civilising Anglo-Irish culture. As the malignant pursuit of irreconcilable 'national' visions created a deadly political stasis, revisionist critics, finding themselves buffeted between the uncompromising 'Britishness' of the North's majority and an ascendant romantic nationalism, eagerly grasped Hewitt's pliant mythology as a literary conceit through which 'planters' might be encouraged to accept their 'condition', and the 'natives' to the 'planters' claim that, "this is our country also" ('The colony'). Accordingly, in a context where, as D. Sharrock notes, "no one wanted to know about Northern Ireland's Protestant culture",⁸⁵ Hewitt's determined inhabitation of that "half-way house between the conditions of Anglo-Irishman and Ulster Protestant" secured his transformation to 'perfect Protestant' for a critically reconstructed Ireland.

⁸⁵D. Sharrock, "Nobody knows the Troubles we've seen", *Guardian*, 23.04.1997, G2 11-12.

CONCLUSION

The evidence behind the presentation of John Hewitt as a martyr and the evidence of the misrepresentation of Samuel Ferguson's relationship to Ireland show that the making and transmission of myths has been an active part of the recent study of Northern Irish Protestant writing in Ireland. The various roles of Hewitt: as victim, champion of regionalism, exemplary Protestant and figure of consistent and public principle are found to be complex mythological constructs. The way in which Hewitt rewrote his relationship to Alexander Irvine is crucial because it reflects his almost theatrical ability to change posture, in the process perhaps even learning from Irvine how to turn himself into a myth. Looked at closely and in detail, the chronology and changing interpretations of Hewitt's career reveal the course and wider importance of this myth making in critical dialogue. Hewitt may have been consciously involved in myth making, but this is a secondary concern. What matters more is that Hewitt's myths were taken up by Northern Ireland's intellectuals after his return to Ireland and increased involvement with the Arts Council Northern Ireland. Within attempts to assert a position for Protestant writing which was literary, cultural and political, Hewitt became the focus for others' definitions. Specifically, Hewitt's 'myths' were appropriated as sources of philanthropic models for community harmony in a context which is distinguished by proliferating, negative views of 'Protestant' cultures and their literary legacies.

AFTERWORD

John Hewitt died in 1987. In 1988, the first John Hewitt International Summer School opened at Garron Tower in County Antrim. Titled, *An Ulster Poet and his Quest*, the School launched Hewitt's mythologies on an independent life that by 1996 had gathered sufficient momentum to forge opposing factions. Edna Longley's removal as academic director prompted a boycott of sufficient magnitude to threaten the School's existence. Replacing Longley as a major influence, Damian Smyth introduced the more populist tinge symbolised by the title of the 1997 School, *Beyond the Planter and the Gael*. Observing the School from the outside, Longley voiced concern that its new direction, "jeopardised the work of years, and compromised the ideals associated with John Hewitt".¹ Similar respect for Hewitt's 'ideals' is evident in Esme Gichuke's report from the inside. Commenting on delegates attending *Beyond the Planter and the Gael* (1997), Gichuke noted that Hewitt's surviving relatives and "eyewitnesses" to his superlative qualities combined to "give us an apostolic flavour of the man himself". Gichuke explained:

So many of the solutions that the political and academic thinkers at the 10th John Hewitt Summer School proposed for our predicament in Northern Ireland were couched in startlingly personal and theological vocabulary: decision, atonement, repentance and forgiveness; restitution and healing and cleansing of the memory; in short, the clamouring

¹ E. Longley quoted in N. Johnston, "QUB prof hits out at Hewitt group", *Belfast Telegraph*, 06.05.1996, 3.

ingredients of John Hewitt's *The Bloody Brae* and his other didactic poems: mercy and kindness and forgiveness given and received.

In a serene mood of peace and resolution and hope, the School ended as it had started; with a parade of delegates round the lawn behind the John Hewitt red and gold tasselled banner to the plaintive marching tunes of both Planter and Gael. 'The green shoot' had flowered once more and the pollen was about to scatter.²

Clearly, whatever schisms have occurred in the management of the John Hewitt International Summer School, reverence towards Hewitt's myths prevails.

²E. Gichuke, "Sending ripples through cultural waters", *Causeway*, 4, 4, (Winter 1997), 6-7.

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